



Outdoor Table Tennis

Advice, guidance and recommendations

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supported by



Table Tennis England, Norfolk House, 88 Saxon Gate West, Milton Keynes, MK9 2DL

Tel: 01908 208860

Email: help@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Web: www.tabletennisengland.co.uk

Why choose outdoor table tennis?

Table tennis is one of the few sports where normal divisions such as gender, disability and age are irrelevant. Everyone can compete against each other on equal terms.

The sport is easy to pick up and play. People can get competent quickly but mastery of the game takes much longer. These factors make the the game very appealing.

Traditionally the sport has always been played indoors in England. Table Tennis England noticed how popular outdoor table tennis was in Europe and China. So in 2009 Table Tennis England, supported by Sport England, installed 47 tables in 26 London parks to measure their impact and popularity. The project was a success. The tables were quickly adopted by the communities they were placed in. Since then outdoor table tennis has been included as part of Table Tennis England's strategy to increase opportunities to play.

The key benefits for organisations who have installed outdoor table tennis tables include:

- Very low maintenance costs after the initial purchase
- The opportunity to engage the local community and encourage social cohesion
- Reduced anti social behaviour in public spaces
- Improved school playground behaviour
- Opportunities to reinvigorate unused space in urban environments
- Added value to outdoor facilities such as playgrounds, outdoor gyms and skate parks
- Provides a family friendly activity that will increase visit times and potentially custom in cafes and shops in close proximity to the tables.



Key Criteria for making your tables a success

1. If funds permit your project should aim to get at least two outdoor tables, to be placed side by side. This encourages social play and increases the opportunity for people to participate.

2. The tables should be placed in areas where they will be visible. If the tables can't be seen, no one will know they are there. If the tables are to go into a public space such as a park, consider putting them where people normally congregate, such as picnic areas or playgrounds.

3. We recommend that each table should be placed in an area measuring 4m x 8m. This allows space for players to circulate around the table safely.



4. There should be clear height above the table of at least 3m, to allow the ball enough space to move during play.
5. The tables should be placed on a hard surface. When playing, participant movement is restricted to the two ends of the table which rapidly wears grass and creates a depression. This depression will fill with water and get muddy when wet or be an injury risk when the ground is hard.
6. Surfaces such as loose gravel or wood chippings are also not recommended. These shift easily creating the same risks as a grass surface and are also problematic for wheelchair users.
7. To avoid this we recommend the tables are placed on a concrete or tarmac surface. Artificial turf is also a possibility, and might be a better aesthetic fit to certain environments. This type of surface is currently untested by Table Tennis England however.
8. The cost of installing a surface can be considerable and should be taken into account when costing out your project.
9. A table tennis ball is light, and is easily affected by the wind. Whilst not a factor that can be eradicated completely there should be consideration about the normal direction of the wind in your chosen location. Ideally the table should be placed where the wind is broken up by trees, hedges or walls.
10. Consider how people will have access to bats and balls. If possible, locate the tables close to a cafe or alternative outlet that could loan or hire equipment out. The presence of the tables could have a positive impact on their business, so it's worth speaking to the owners about the project and getting them involved.



Outdoor Table Tennis Tables

There is a wide range of tables available, and they can be grouped in three main types: concrete, composite and rollaway.

Concrete tables - weigh at least one ton and are placed directly onto the surface. They are installed by the company that supplies them. These tables are extremely durable and ideal for locations where the public has unlimited access to them.

Composite tables - designs vary, so it's worth checking the suppliers' website to see what they look like. These tables are fixed to the ground with bolts. Some suppliers will install these on site whilst others will require self assembly. Composite tables are generally cheaper than concrete ones, but due to their lighter construction are more susceptible to damage. These tables are better suited to locations that are under regular supervision.

Rollaways - outdoor rollaway tables are weatherproof but designed to be kept in storage when not in use. They are ideal for home or community centre use, where there is space to store them. They can also be a great compromise if a hard surface isn't feasible - the tables can be moved regularly to prevent wearing of the surface and to experiment with the best location.

When choosing a location, bear in mind that the suppliers will need access to the site, particularly for the heavy weight tables. Ideally the site will be accessible by a Land Rover sized vehicle.

Other Things to Consider

Table Tennis England recommends that tables should be disability friendly. A disability friendly table will have its supporting legs set back 40cm from the end of the table. This space allows a wheelchair user to manoeuvre freely when playing.

It's worth checking to see if there have been any outdoor tables installed close to your location. Seeing outdoor tables in situ may help when creating your project.

Bats for indoor use are not particularly resilient to the elements or from repeated rough use. Because of this we recommend that bats made from composite materials are used, which are waterproof and shock resistant. There are a number of table tennis equipment sellers that sell these bats. That is not to say that traditional bats cannot be used!

There are now outdoor table tennis balls available to purchase. These balls are a little heavier than standard balls, but retain the same bounce and playability. The extra weight help to mitigate the 'wind factor' somewhat.



Your Outdoor Table Tennis Project

Table Tennis England has been working in partnership with a wide variety of organisations to help them install outdoor table tennis tables for four years. On occasions there are some problems and barriers that can delay or put a project at risk.

The majority of these problems can be addressed or mitigated by taking into account the following:

Establish a need: Why will outdoor table tennis make a difference to your organisation or community?

Identify a suitable location: Using the key criteria outlined above.

Estimate cost: Obtain quotes for the tables and other additional costs, such as surfacing, bats, balls and promotion.

Create a project: Draw up a project plan. This will help you to cost the project and help to sell it to partners and communities. A project plan is essential if you are planning to apply for funding.

Work in partnership: If the tables are earmarked for public use, consult with the local council, community groups and any other organisations likely to be affected by the tables to ensure that the project is supported.

Get permissions: Investigate whose permission needs to be sought to use the ground, then explain the project to them. Outdoor tables should not require planning permission, but they still represent a significant and long term change to the location.

Ask the locals: It's important to ensure the location chosen is right. One of the few incidents of vandalism occurred when the tables were placed where the local park users didn't want them. Ask a variety of local people their opinions about the suggested location. People who work regularly in those places such as park wardens or gardeners can be a great source of information.

Find funding: There are lots of funding opportunities to take advantage of. More information is provided below.

Be thorough: There are lots of organisations applying for funding and you are in competition with all of them. Make sure that your application covers all of the key elements required, represent good value for money, targets the key audience and will have a long term legacy.

Funding

The initial set up costs for outdoor table tennis can be expensive. Making use of funding and grant opportunities is a great way to fund your project. Finding the right funding opportunity can be time consuming. There are a large number available, and each has a different set of qualification criteria.

A good place to start is www.fundingcentral.org.uk which will provide you with a list of grants and loan opportunities based upon your project and location.

Sport England also offers a number of different funding opportunities, details of which can be found at www.sportengland.org/funding

Hard Standing Surface

The cost of putting down a surface for the tables to go on can be considered to be a permanent structure, and therefore possibly excluded from what you can claim for in your funding bid. This is not always the case so it is best to double check the funding criteria.

Research done by Table Tennis England puts the cost of a concrete surface measuring 4m x 8m between £1,500 and £3,000. Some organisations have been able to reduce this cost by approaching local builders and asking them to put down surface at cost or as a charitable act, in return for some positive PR.

If this option is not feasible it is worth considering purchasing an outdoor rollaway table instead. This will enable you to move the table around the playing area and reduce the wearing to the grass.



Other Considerations

To make the most of the funding you are applying for, can you expand the project to include additional tables or other sporting equipment?

It all depends on the proposed locations but some ideas include:

A wider reaching project: To help embed the tables into the community, consider adding the cost of indoor tables and coach fees into the budget. Placing tables into surrounding community halls or youth centres will help to increase the reach of table tennis. A coach running engaging sessions on the new tables will help to raise the profile of the tables and get people playing.

Landscaping: Some urban areas might benefit from some renovation or work to make them a safer playing environment.

Seating or canopies: There are a number of companies that provide canopies or roofing for play areas, which are great for acting as wind barriers or shelter from the elements. Seating near to the tables can also help make the tables a centre of attraction.

Other sports and activities: Is there space and funding to include other activities such as outdoor gyms or basketball?

Outdoor Table Suppliers

The following alphabetical list of companies are known by Table Tennis England to sell outdoor table tennis tables. Care should be taken on choice of model required dependent on the proposed location and use. Contact the companies direct for product specifications, availability and current prices.

	<p>Website: www.playgroundequipment-amv.co.uk Email: sales@amvplaygrounds.co.uk Tel. No: 01704 895331</p>
	<p>Website: www.bribaroutdoor.co.uk Email: sales@bribartt.co.uk Tel. No: 01227 860348</p>
	<p>Website: www.caloo.co.uk/produce-category/outdoor-table-tennis-tables Email: info@caloo.co.uk Tel. No: 08450</p>
	<p>Website: www.concretesports.co.uk Email: info@concretesports.co.uk Tel. No: 08458 626086</p>
	<p>Website: www.ejwglendinning.co.uk Email: sales@ejwglendinning.co.uk Tel. No: 01364 652601</p>
	<p>Website: www.theoutdoortabletenniscompany.com Email: info@theoutdoortabletenniscompany.com Tel. No: 01249 444537</p>
	<p>Website: www.parkleisure.com Email: enquiries@parkleisure.com Tel. No: 08000 197009</p>
	<p>Website: www.playcrete.com Email: wendy@bendcrete.com Tel. No: 01235 534359</p>
	<p>Website: www.teessport.com Email: mm@teessport.com Tel. No: 08004 584141 (Freephone) or 01642 217844</p>
	<p>Website: www.streetscape-products.co.uk Email: info@streetscape-products.co.uk Tel. No: 01757 707735</p>
	<p>Website: www.uktabletennis.co.uk Email: sales@uktabletennis.co.uk Tel. No: 01403 865094</p>

Help and advice

We will be happy to provide you with advice and guidance, as well as helping to promote your good work once the tables are in place.

For general queries and advice please visit our website www.tabletennisengland.co.uk or email: help@tabletennisengland.co.uk. Details of area staff are as follows:

Area Lead - South

Chris Brown Tel: 07717 822617
chris.brown@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Development and Volunteering Officer - London and South East

Jenny Leach Tel: 07421 748625
jenny.leach@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Development and Volunteering Officer - South

Lee Monk Tel: 07561 112817
lee.monk@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Development and Volunteering Officer - South

Gemma Parry Tel: 07739 017564
gemma.parry@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Area Lead - North

Martin Ireland Tel: 07971 186405
martin.ireland@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Development and Volunteering Officer - North

Mark Willerton Tel: 07766 647546
mark.willerton@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Development and Volunteering Officer - North

Chris Newton Tel: 07904 115138
chris.newton@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Development and Volunteering Officer - North

Andrea Holt Tel: 07841 678617
andrea.holt@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Development and Volunteering Officer - North

Sally Shutt Tel: 07792 785738
sally.shutt@tabletennisengland.co.uk

Help and advice (continued)

County Sport Partnerships (CSPs) are networks of local agencies that connect national and regional organisations with an interest in sport to deliver a locally focussed strategy for increasing physical activity. They can provide you with support and advice, and help put you in touch with funding opportunities specific to your region.

There are 50 CSPs and you can find details of your local contact on www.cspnetwork.org

Local Authorities often employ someone whose responsibility is to develop sport and activity within their authority boundaries. They will be interested to hear about your project and can help to provide specific local advice.

Disclaimer

This guidance is intended to provide helpful data and advice and whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the contents, Table Tennis England shall not at any time, in any circumstances, be held responsible or liable to any party in respect of any loss, damage or costs of any nature arising directly or indirectly from reliance placed on the guidance within it.