

Cabinet

17 November 2021

County Playing Pitch Strategy

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth

Councillor James Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report seeks Cabinet approval for the adoption of Durham's Playing Pitch Strategy 2021-2035 (Appendix 2).

Executive summary

- 2 Durham County Council completed a Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) in 2021 with the primary purpose of providing a strategic framework that ensures the provision of playing pitch facilities meets the local needs of existing and future residents. This is necessary to protect playing pitches against development pressures; to identify future pitch demand issues in relation to predicted population changes and specific sports development pressures; and to assist in addressing budget pressures.
- 3 Demographic forecasts, consultation with stakeholders and sports club and team data are gathered to provide an evidence base for planning decisions to support the County Durham Local Plan policies in relation to formal recreation. It is a key component when Sport England, as a statutory consultee, are asked for their view on planning applications. Sport England require the PPS to be formally adopted by the Council.
- 4 This evidence is continually refreshed as developments are realised, new developments come forward, club and team data changes and so on, ensuring the strategy remains relevant throughout its lifecycle.

- 5 Thus, the strategy provides robust evidence that is capable of being scrutinised through examination whilst meeting the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). One of the core planning principles of the NPPF is to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs. Section 8 of the NPPF deals specifically with the topic of healthy communities; Paragraph 96 discusses the importance of access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation that can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities.
- 6 The full report details the background, scope, consultation and summary findings contained within the County Playing Pitch Strategy and it considers delivery of report recommendations. It also considers future monitoring/maintenance of the strategy and associated consultation data, together with a copy of the database (Appendix 5) which has been circulated to National Governing Bodies and key stakeholders in February this year, to confirm data remains up to date as previously mentioned.
- 7 The Playing Pitch Strategy will complement the Leisure Centre Transformation programme informing the outdoor sport elements as well as the wider leisure framework.

Recommendation(s)

- 8 Cabinet is recommended to
 - (a) adopt the Playing Pitch Strategy and the principles applied to Durham County Council's current and future provision of sports pitches/facilities and recognise its links to the County Durham Plan;
 - (b) approve the suggested mechanisms and governance structure for delivery of the main strategy recommendations, and for ensuring that team and population data remain up to date throughout the strategy lifespan;
 - (c) agree the principles of inclusive prioritisation criteria detailed in this report, and the associated process (triage) for dealing with new projects as they come forward;
 - (d) support a programme of strategic investment to deliver the PPS through developer Section 106 contributions, external sports funding and DCC's Capital Programme;
 - (e) support a financial commitment to the improved maintenance of existing, and new pitches/facilities through a combination of uplifted revenue budgets, reallocated revenue and commuted

sums from developers to ensure benefits of capital investment are not lost.

Background

- 9 The Government's 2015 Sports Strategy, "Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation" highlighted concern nationally over the loss of playing fields which prompted the development of localised playing pitch assessments and strategies which identify current and future requirements.
- 10 Playing Pitch Strategies deliver the evidence required to ensure that sufficient land is available to meet existing and projected future playing pitch requirements. Their evidence base should inform and be implemented into planning policy and other relevant corporate strategies to enable local policies, planning and sports development criteria to work efficiently and effectively.
- 11 In January 2019, Culture, Sport & Tourism commissioned Knight Kavanagh & Page Consultants to provide an updated County Durham Playing Pitch Strategy in line with Sport England's Guidance: *an approach to developing and delivering a PPS*.
- 12 Since the initial evidence base was gathered in 2019, stakeholders have continued to provide updates on demographic changes (eg. new developments proposed), changes in pitch configuration and sports club/team data throughout 2020 to now, to ensure the strategy remains "live"
- 13 The strategy provides a clear, strategic framework for the maintenance and improvement of existing playing pitch provision and accompanying ancillary facilities up to 2035, in line with the emerging County Durham Local Plan.
- 14 The Strategy has been developed to provide:
 - a vision for the future improvement and prioritisation of playing pitches;
 - a series of strategic recommendations for the improvement, maintenance, development and, as appropriate, rationalisation of the playing pitch stock;
 - a series of sport by sport recommendations which provide a strategic framework for sport led improvements to provision;
 - a prioritised area-by-area Action Plan to address key issues on a site-by-site basis.
- 15 The Strategy provides a clear framework for all playing pitch providers including public, private and third sector. It addresses the needs of

identified sports within the area, picking up on local demand issues, and considers population growth, major growth/regeneration areas and cross boundary facility provision.

- 16 The Strategy, as a robust study, aims to stand up to scrutiny; enable strategic investment, provide evidence to support external funding applications and provide realistic aspirations that are implementable within the County.
- 17 It is intended that the PPS will have a lifespan up to 2035, starting from the date of adoption, subject to its regular monitoring, maintenance and delivery.
- 18 It should be noted that the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) is, in its purest sense, a document required as an evidence base for the Local Plan which was previously adopted by Cabinet in October 2020.
- 19 The PPS must be formally adopted by the Council in order for Sport England to recognise its validity. Sport England will then use it to assess planning applications for which they are a statutory consultee where there will be an impact on green space, pitches and outdoor sports facilities.

Scope

- 20 A steering group, comprising Council Officers from Culture, Sport and Tourism (CST), Corporate Property and Land (CPaL), Spatial Policy, Environmental Services (grounds maintenance) and Education together with Sport National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Sport England and County Sport Partnership, was formed to contribute to the development of the PPS.
- 21 The steering group agreed that the study should include the main outdoor pitch sports of Football, Cricket, Rugby Union, Rugby League and Hockey (including Artificial Turf Pitches). Non-pitch sports are excluded from the PPS.
- 22 The study area is the whole of Durham County Council's administrative area. In addition, cross-boundary issues were explored to determine the level of imported and exported demand from and to neighbouring authorities.
- 23 Analysis areas (or sub areas) were determined to allow for a more narrowed study and these are aligned to the Council's five Local Plan delivery areas or North, South, East, West and Central. They incorporate the Local Plan monitoring areas, of which there are nine.

Consultation

Pitch Quantity

- 24 All playing pitches are included irrespective of ownership, management and use. Playing pitch sites were initially identified using Sport England's *Active Places* database with the Council and National Governing Bodies of Sport supporting the process by checking and updating the initial data. Data was also verified against club information supplied by local leagues.
- 25 In total there are 379 Football pitches, 59 Cricket (Squares), 43 Rugby pitches, 5 Hockey (full size sand or water based) and 16 Artificial Grass Pitches (full size) in the County. Durham County Council has 70 football pitches and a handful of cricket and rugby pitches for community hire. Not all DCC owned pitches are in use, a number are "lapsed pitch sites" which means they are not hired out for various reasons including, for example, having no ancillary facilities, being water logged and unplayable, or depending on the location, there may be no demand.

Pitch Demand & Methodology

- 26 A variety of consultation methods were used to collate demand information from leagues, clubs, county associations and national/regional governing bodies of sport.
- 27 Face to face consultation was carried out with key clubs from each sport. This allowed for the collection of detailed demand information and an exploration of key issues to be interrogated and more accurately assessed.
- 28 For data analysis purposes, an online survey (converted to postal if required) was sent to all clubs not covered by face to face consultation. Issues identified by clubs returning questionnaires were followed up by telephone or face to face interviews. Club and team response rates were Football 73%; Cricket 81%; Rugby Union & League 100%, Hockey 60%.
- 29 Full details of the consultee response rate are shown in the table below:

Sport	Total number	Number responding	Response rate	Methods of consultation
Football teams*	798**	585	73%	Face to face On-line survey Telephone
Cricket clubs	53	43	81%	On-line survey Telephone
Rugby Union clubs	9	9	100%	Face to face

				On-line survey
Rugby league clubs	2	2	100%	Face to face On-line survey
Hockey clubs	5	3	60%	Face to face Telephone
Universities	1	1	100%	Face to face
Secondary Schools/colleges	36	30	83%	Face to face Telephone
Primary/ SEN schools	78	33	42%	On-line survey Telephone

*Please note that a team response rate is accepted by FA/Sport England

**Excludes imported clubs and teams that have been identified through consultations.

30 Alongside current demand, it is important for a PPS to assess whether the future demand for playing pitches can be met. Using population projections, and proposed housing growth, an estimate of the likely future demand for playing pitches was calculated.

Main Findings

- 31 From a quantitative perspective, there are identified current and future shortfalls in grass pitch provision for all sports, and most pitch types (i.e. junior, senior, mini). Grass pitch shortfalls are generally a result of overplay on pitches of poor quality; a lack of floodlit training areas; and a lack of Artificial Grass Pitches meaning clubs train on match pitches.
- 32 Where demand is being met, this does not equate to a surplus of provision, with any spare capacity instead considered as a solution to overcoming current shortfalls and accommodating existing or future demand. As such there is a clear need to protect all existing playing provision until all demand is met, or there is a requirement to replace provision to an equal or better quantity and quality before it is lost.
- 33 For the most part, shortfalls can be alleviated by better utilising current provision, primarily through improving quality but also by installing additional floodlighting, improving ancillary facilities and enabling access to existing unused provision, such as at unavailable school sites. Re-provision of disused or lapsed sites and pitch re-configuration or re-designation are other options to overcome shortfalls.
- 34 With resources to improve the quality of grass pitches being limited, an increase in 3G provision could also help reduce grass pitch shortfalls through the transfer of play, thus reducing overplay which in turn can aid pitch quality improvements. Shortfalls of 3G pitches can only be met by creating new provision.

- 35 The FA/Football Foundation uses Local Football Facility Plans (LFFP) to identify opportunities to accurately target investment in football facilities across local areas. The County Durham LFFP, approved by the Football Foundation in June 2019, has a ten year vision containing proposals for 8 new build 3G's; 29 sites for natural turf improvements (88 full size pitch equivalents); 9 refurbished and 5 new build changing rooms across public, parish and education sites, subject to their normal funding application process and availability of match funds. There is no guarantee that a funding application will be successful, however, inclusion in the LFFP is regarded as a positive indicator for approval of a Football Foundation award.
- 36 These LFFP football priorities are adopted within the PPS recommendations.
- 37 Whilst it would have been desirable to release both the PPS and LFFP together, the delay in the inspection of the County Durham Plan meant the LFFP, was published ahead in October 2019 by the Football Foundation.
- 38 Therefore, LFFP projects coming forward would need to be reviewed to ensure they are still relevant within the latest iteration of the local plan.

Planning Implications

- 39 Sport England has an established role with local planning authorities which are statutorily required to consult it on any applications for development affecting playing field land. Sport England primarily assesses applications against its planning policy objectives. These aim to ensure that a planned approach to the provision of facilities and opportunities for sport is taken by local planning authorities in order to meet the needs of the local community.
- 40 The PPS helps determine the level of local provision required, based on local assessments, and will be a key component when Sport England are asked for their view on planning applications. The strategy considers objectives, particularly in relation to the County's long-term plans for housing, being a key part of the evidence base for the County Durham Local Plan.

Sport England Representations to Pre-Submission Draft County Durham Plan

- 41 In January 2019, the Council published the Pre-Submission draft of the County Durham Plan for statutory consultation under regulation 19 of the Town & Country Planning (Local Planning England) Regulations 2012.

- 42 In response to this statutory consultation, Sport England submitted a formal response to the draft plan on 8 March 2019 detailing its objection to the plan and associated allocations which result, either in whole or part in the loss of playing field or have the potential to prejudice the use of playing field.
- 43 In the absence of a current, complete PPS, the Council agreed to several proposed modifications to the County Durham Plan to satisfy the concerns raised and a Statement of Common Ground was agreed between the parties. Subject to these changes, Sport England accepts that its objections to the Plan would be met. (A copy of the signed Statement of Common Ground can be found at Appendix 3.)

Future Governance

- 44 The objectives and actions within the strategy document need to be delivered and implemented by a wide range of organisations with a vested interest in ensuring that existing playing fields, pitches and ancillary facilities are protected and enhanced. To this end the steering group was formed to contribute to development of the PPS.
- 45 The steering group will also be broadened to include representation by Public Health colleagues to ensure coherent joint working in relation to the County's health agenda.
- 46 Whilst the Council is expected to take a lead role, it will not necessarily be the agency which delivers all these actions or recommendations; they apply to all the stakeholders and partners involved. It should be noted there is no commitment on the Council or its partners to deliver on any or all of the recommendations, however it is considered to be in the interests of the Council to do so where capacity and resources are made available.
- 47 Therefore, it is proposed that CST, as strategic lead, engages with relevant steering group partners who will continue to regularly review and support strategic direction.
- 48 Then, as strategy recommendations inevitably become projects to be delivered, it is also proposed that an existing DCC internal working group, "Playing Pitch Action Plans (PPAPs) and Projects Group" be formally recognised as the forum for implementation.
- 49 This internal officer group currently comprises representation from CST, CPaL, Environmental Services (Clean and Green), Spatial Policy, Partnerships. Following presentation of this strategy to other Directorates, it is envisaged that additional officers from CYPS and AHS, including Public Health, will attend on an "as and when" required basis.

- 50 Given the extent of potential actions, it is reasonable to assume that it will not necessarily be possible to support all the actions identified but where the action is a priority and resource is available, there will be a clear emphasis on delivery.

Future Delivery

- 51 The PPS provides guidance for maintenance/management decisions and investment across the Durham County Council area. By addressing the issues identified and using the strategic framework presented in the Strategy, the current and future playing pitch needs of County Durham can be met.
- 52 Whilst recognising that the primary purpose of the PPS is to inform planning policy, it is beneficial for the Council to consider other factors when looking at prioritisation of resources to deliver the recommendations. To this end, it is proposed that several other inclusive factors be applied to the prioritisation process and an assessment be undertaken to determine key projects. These factors include:
- (a) Links to other DCC priorities and countywide programmes (Leisure Transformation, Towns and Villages, etc);
 - (b) IMD Impact;
 - (c) Health and Well-being Impact;
 - (d) Inclusion (Gender equality, BAME, Disability sport);
 - (e) Links to National Governing Body Strategies;
 - (f) Access to external funding.
- 53 It is the intention that a capital request for support of key priority projects be included in the next round of bidding to DCC's Capital Programme to ensure investment in community sport remains a focus and complements the Council's existing investment in leisure centres.

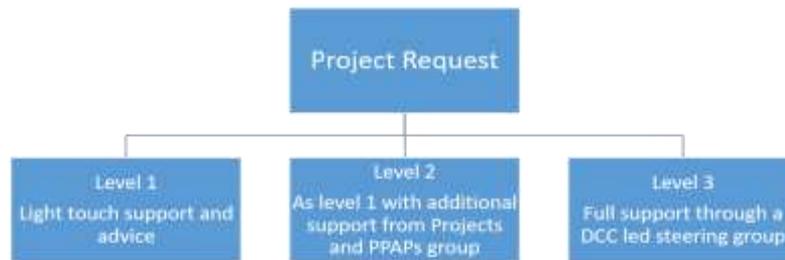
On-going maintenance and future sustainability

- 54 The value of capital investment can only be fully realised if there is a financial commitment to the on-going maintenance and upkeep of pitches/facilities. Many of the recommendations within the PPS relate to the improvement of quality of pitches which increases the capacity for additional teams, and this positively affects pitch supply. However, maintenance regimes have been gradually reduced over years as a result of public sector austerity, and year on year service savings.

- 55 Works to bring these pitches back up to the level of quality expected will likely require capital investment initially, but it is the on-going maintenance regimes which will ensure their continued use in the future.
- 56 Of DCC's 70 pitches, there are currently 51 on the PPS database for hire which are being maintained to a basic level, comprising predominantly grass cutting, and very little specialist attention. This has resulted in many of the pitches being left unplayable as the season progresses due to poor drainage and so on.
- 57 It is proposed that the existing revenue budget for pitch maintenance be reviewed and, where necessary, uplifted to deliver the level of maintenance proposed by Sport England as shown in Appendix 4. This will ensure pitches are available for the whole season, benefit the users and reduce the number of complaints received by the service for non-availability of facilities.
- 58 Appropriate resourcing should also be provided when pitches on education sites are retained by the Council, after closure or relocation of the school, academy or college which formerly maintained them. Examples are Roseberry, Blackfyne and Tudhoe. These sites have no maintenance budget currently allocated to them.
- 59 This also applies to new changing pavilions and ancillary facilities not currently on the Council's non-schools' asset register, which transfer to CPAL for on-going maintenance and compliance monitoring.
- 60 Where new pitches/facilities are developed as part of new housing developments etc, it is proposed that an appropriate commuted sum be sought from the developer as part of the Section 106 agreement and aligned to secure the future maintenance needs.

New Projects

- 61 As the PPS was undertaken at a specific point in time, it is reasonable to assume that new projects will emerge as clubs develop, communities change and so on. As is currently the case, the PPAPs and Projects Group regularly receive requests for project assistance and as a community led Council, we would expect to support all where possible.
- 62 We have therefore developed a Triage Process to ensure all projects can receive appropriate support. Based on three levels as shown below:



63 Level 1 would be projects that are not included in the PPS but are beneficial to the community. These would be supported through Club Durham, AAPs, Sport and Physical Activity Officers in areas such as applying for external funding, business plan guidance, project planning, etc.

64 Level 2 would be projects included in the PPS recommendations but are not priorities under the terms highlighted in paragraph 45-46 above. These would be supported as per level 1 together with PPAPS and Project Group support.

65 Level 3 would be projects included in the PPS recommendations and are high priority, for example, their delivery is required to facilitate Sport England lifting a statutory planning objection. These would be supported by a DCC led project steering group.

Monitoring and Updating

66 It is important that there is regular annual monitoring and review against the actions identified in the Strategy, also taking account of any changes in pitch quality (pitch capacity) and demand as well as new provision that has been created. It is further suggested that alongside regular Steering Group meetings, a good way to keep the PPS up to date and maintain relationships is to hold sport specific meetings with pitch sport NGBs and other relevant parties.

67 It should be noted that if no review and subsequent update has been carried out within three years of the strategy being signed off by the steering group, Sport England and the NGBs will consider the PPS and the information on which it is based to be out of date.

68 It is important that the Council also maintains the data contained within the accompanying PPS database. This will enable it to refresh and update the work on a regular season by season basis.

- 69 To ensure the PPS has remained up to date since the initial audit work was undertaken, the PPAPS and Projects group has continued to meet monthly throughout 2020 until now, to respond to the outdoor sports clubs' needs and requests, and to deliver PPS recommendations where resources allow.
- 70 Sport England also has a national database of playing fields (Active Places Power) which is updated annually and is used by DCC officers to confirm the latest position on pitches in Parish, education or private ownership.
- 71 In January this year, a meeting of the PPS Steering Group was conducted to discuss delivery of the as yet unadopted PPS, bringing updated information about clubs and teams, and to share sport specific priority projects with the group. Following that meeting, the "live" database was circulated to the group for any updates and changes to team/club demand shown in Appendix 5.
- 72 Subsequently, the second meeting of this group took place in March where the presentation of DCC's Leisure Transformation was shared, ahead of inclusion of the outdoor elements of the programme as a potential priority for the Council.
- 73 These PPS Steering Group meetings will continue to be key to ensuring the PPS document remains "live" and relevant.
- 74 In addition, Culture Sport & Tourism are developing an IT database that will link to Sport England's Active Places data and ensure on-going changes in pitch supply (number/type) are captured. When aligned to pitch demand supplied by NGB's (number of teams by age group) this will provide a system that ensures supply and demand data is absolutely accurate at any given point in time. The system will also allow for specific sites scenario testing when planning applications affecting pitches come forward for consideration.

Conclusion

- 75 The Playing Pitch Strategy provides evidence to support production of the County Durham Plan, as well as schemes which involve the development of existing school sites. The strategy contains a number of recommendations, and these will be subject to further scrutiny as the County Durham Plan's recommendations are delivered.
- 76 Adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy is a significant step towards meeting the County's sporting needs. By ensuring supply is sufficient to meet demand, now and for the future, and providing a basis on which resources can be targeted to strategic sites, the Council will be in a

position to work with communities towards increasing participation in sport and physical activity.

- 77 To ensure that the full value of this strategy is realised, it is essential to align the appropriate revenue to support the on-going maintenance and therefore the future sustainability of the pitches/facilities that are developed.

Background papers

- Playing Pitch Strategy

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

As referenced in the report, it is proposed that a capital bid be made to the Council's Capital Programme to support priority projects, and to maximise the opportunity of accessing match funding from external bodies such as Sport England and the Football Foundation. It is estimated that £914,050 would be required to address current condition issues of the the majority of DCC's natural turf pitch stock. The breakdown of which is as follows:

PITCH TYPE	PPS QUALITY RATING (CURRENT)	TARGET QUALITY RATING	NUMBER OF SITES	NUMBER OF PITCHES	SITE INSPECTIONS RECD	INSPECTION FEE PER SITE	TOTAL INSPECTION FEES	PITCHES REQUIRING REFURB	REFURB FEE PER PITCH	TOTAL REFURB FEES	PITCHES REQUIRING DRAINAGE	DRAINAGE FEE PER PITCH	TOTAL DRAINAGE FEES	TOTAL INVESTMENT RECD
Senior	Poor	Standard	6	14*	6	150.00	900.00	2	10,000.00	20,000.00	10	40,000.00	400,000.00	420,900.00
Senior	Standard	Good	17	21	16	150.00	2,400.00	19	10,000.00	190,000.00	2	40,000.00	80,000.00	272,400.00
Youth 11v11	Poor	Standard	3	4	3	150.00	450.00	3	10,000.00	30,000.00	1	40,000.00	40,000.00	70,450.00
Youth 11v11	Standard	Good	1	1	0	150.00	0.00	1	10,000.00	10,000.00	0	40,000.00	0.00	10,000.00
Youth 9v9	Poor	Standard	3	3#	0	150.00	0.00	1	10,000.00	10,000.00	1	40,000.00	40,000.00	50,000.00
Youth 9v9	Standard	Good	4	5	1	150.00	150.00	4	10,000.00	40,000.00	1	40,000.00	40,000.00	80,150.00
Youth 7v7	Standard	Good	1	1	1	150.00	150.00	1	10,000.00	10,000.00	0	40,000.00	0.00	10,150.00
Totals			35	32	27		4,050.00	31		310,000.00	15		600,000.00	914,050.00

MTFP 12 includes an allocation of £250,000 (yet to be approved) to commence some of these works, with further funding opportunities to be explored for the remainder. This could include Section 106, AAP funding or a further bid to a future MTFP.

Neighbourhood and Climate Change (NCC) Directorate is responsible for grounds maintenance of DCC pitches. The average cost of maintenance of a standard pitch is £2,000 per annum. It has been calculated by the service that a further £800 would be required to increase the level of maintenance as specified by Sport England (Appendix 4).

As referenced in the report, there are currently 51 DCC pitches maintained by the Clean and Green Service which equates to a proposed £40,800 uplift in the revenue budget, on top of the existing budget of £102,000, together with a sum of £2,800 per pitch for former school facilities Tudhoe Grange, Blackfyne and more recently Shildon which equates to a further amount of circa £30,000.

At this stage, options are being explored as to where this funding could be secured. These include Public Health (subject to the outcome of a budget prioritisation exercise) or Planning.

For new projects, a commuted sum equating to £2,800 (inflation linked) per standard pitch per year would be expected from developers for a minimum of 10 years.

Consultation

The strategy has been prepared in consultation with pitch users, town and parish councils, education, assets, grounds maintenance, national governing bodies (NGB) (sport), County Durham Sport and other pitch providers.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Climate Change

All projects brought forward will be considered in relation to carbon reduction objectives set by the Council.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

The strategy forms an essential part of the evidence base for the County Durham Plan. Without an up to date Playing Pitch Strategy there is a risk that elements of the County Durham Plan (for example allocated strategic sites) would be found unsound. In addition, it would be difficult to demonstrate to Sport England that there was a sufficient quantity of pitches across County Durham thus impacting on planning applications.

Procurement

None.

Appendix 2: Playing Pitch Strategy

Attached as separate document.

Appendix 3: Signed Statement of Common Ground

Attached as separate document.

Appendix 4: Sport England Pitch Maintenance Schedule

Attached as separate document.

Appendix 5: Database Updates Process

Attached as separate document.