



Report of Corporate Management Team

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Councillor Neil Foster, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

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Purpose of the Report

1. This report highlights the key findings and recommendations of the County Durham Playing Pitch Strategy.

Background

2. The Playing Pitch Strategy is primarily concerned with voluntary participation by adults and young people in competitive association football, cricket, rugby union, rugby league and hockey. It presents the key findings arising from extensive survey work and consultation, highlighting areas of both concern and opportunity and sets out a vision and strategy for the future delivery of sports pitches across the County.
3. The Playing Pitch Strategy has been developed alongside Planning Policy Guidance note 17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport & Recreation) compliant Sport and Physical Activity Facilities Strategy which considers the provision of a wide range of sports facility types and evaluates the demand for these facilities in County Durham. Sport England has an established planning role with local planning authorities statutorily required to consult them on any planning application 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. The playing pitch strategy 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. It is intended that the Playing Pitch Strategy will have an initial life span of five years, starting from the date of adoption (it is expected the period will be from 2012 – 2017 inclusive).
4. The strategy also considers longer term objectives, particularly the delivery of the sports and leisure strategy and in relation to the County's long-term plan for housing, being a key part of the evidence base for the County Durham Plan. It is also recommended that the strategy is subject to annual review by

the County Council, with a more formalised review at the end of the strategy period.

Objective of the Strategy

5. The key objectives of the Playing Pitch Strategy:
 - Analyse the current level of pitch provision, including the geographical spread and quality of pitches;
 - Identify the demand for pitches in County Durham;
 - Evaluate levels of over / under supply through the application of the Playing Pitch Methodology;
 - Identify how facilities for pitch sports can be improved to meet the needs of residents;
 - Provide strategic options including:
 - provision to be protected;
 - provision to be enhanced;
 - relocation of pitches;
 - proposals and opportunities for new provision; and,
 - sites considered to be surplus.
 - Provide information to inform the decision making process and evaluate future development proposals including the production of specific local standards relating to playing pitch provision.
6. The aspirations of the strategy are aligned to the sport and leisure strategy, to sustain and raise participation levels in physical activity across the County. It is intended that the findings of this strategy will help ensure that the quantity, quality of playing pitches, and accessibility to pitches meets the needs of the local population, now and in the future, thus maximising the opportunity for participation.
7. Analysis at both County level and the 14 AAP's enables a more detailed understanding of the adequacy of pitches to meet demand across the County, and is more sensitive to understanding the specific issues which arise in different parts of the County.
8. The playing pitch document is accompanied by 14 AAP Profiles. Each profile contains bespoke supply and demand analysis which reflects the use and participation of sport within the area. Each profile has an action plan with strategic recommendations for addressing identified issues.
9. The data allows analysis and testing to be carried out for future developments, enabling an informed decision making process.

Key Findings

10. County Durham has some of the lowest sport and physical activity participation levels in the country, which is reflected in the wide range of health inequalities within the population. The direct costs of physical inactivity to NHS County Durham are estimated at £8.3m per annum compared to an average PCT cost across the country of £5m per annum (based on 2006/07 data). Increasing participation levels in physical activity by 10% could save

6,000 lives and £500 million per year. The Council has developed a 'Sport and Leisure Service Strategy' (2011-2014) which sets out how the sport and leisure service will evolve over the next three years. Within the framework of the wider aims and aspirations of the Council, it focuses on a single aim to increase and sustain participation levels within County Durham. The target is to increase participation in sport and physical activity by 2% over the strategy period.

11. County Durham has the potential to **secure an adequate supply of pitches** to meet current and future demand. When school sites are secured for community access through 'Community Use Agreements', the County will comfortably meet current and future demand. The pitches used to analyse the supply and demand throughout the strategy are all within sites that allow some form of public access for formal fixtures. Numerous pitches in schools exist unused outside the pitch supply utilised within the analysis. The quantity of pitches is not an issue, however accessing the provision in a planned and coordinated way is fundamental to the future of playing pitch provision across the County.
12. **The Quality of pitches** is a main concern to both suppliers and users. It follows from the above, that after securing community access, the pitches that best fit the requirements of both the users and providers, should be prioritised for investment to improve quality.
13. The strategy aims to provide **sustainable sports facilities**. Numerous facilities throughout the County are located within parks which cannot provide the quality of pitches expected by users. Open access facilities are vulnerable to vandalism and misuse. Resources could be targeted more efficiently, where users will see a greater end benefit, rather than attempting to maintain pitches to the same standard.
14. Changing facilities need to be fit for purpose. The need for segregation and flexibility to accommodate young children, girls and women, and disabled users cannot be achieved in outdated changing facilities which were designed for a former age. This is best achieved where sports facilities are grouped around 'hubs'.
15. The strategy identifies a need to provide more small (juniors) pitches, appropriate for the age of user. The majority of this provision can be achieved by reducing the number of senior pitches and reconfiguring them as juniors. Marking out pitches within education sites in accordance with the appropriate age ranges would ensure that schools address the issue of junior provision.
16. **Insufficient Hockey pitches** are available for training and growth of the league structure. The lack of a junior league structure is preventing growth in the sport. Competition for use of all weather synthetic pitches with other pitch sports also prevents the opportunity to train.
17. **Grass pitches are being used for training and formal games** because of the lack of training facilities. Training pitches are also required for formal fixtures and this significantly impacts on the quality of the pitch provision. Provision of **floodlit Artificial Turf Pitches (ATP's) for training** would take

pressure off the grass pitches, and allow them time to recover after use. It is essential to provide a suitable alternative for training purposes.

18. **Rugby league and Rugby Union are growing sports.** Although provision is centred on a small number of established clubs, pitch and ancillary facilities are inadequate.
19. The adopted strategy needs to be logically and objectively formulated, reflecting the aims of all stakeholders. If this is achieved it will encourage external investment, increase the likely success rate of funding applications and direct compensatory payments through planning conditions (Section 106 agreements/Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)).
20. Ensure sports facilities are **accessible**. Whilst the strategy proposes the concentration of facilities, careful detailed planning needs to ensure that a good geographical spread is achieved.
21. Appropriate **use of green space**. Although the general theme of the strategy is one of fewer sites and higher quality, this does not necessarily result in the loss of green space. Any site which is identified as surplus to sporting need must be assessed within the wider context of the Open Space Needs Assessment Strategy, although the release of surplus sites could enable others to be improved to achieve the appropriate standards.
22. Consistency in **administration** of pitches. The fragmented nature of supply leads to inconsistency in administration and pricing.
23. Establish a **quality standard** for pitches. A good pitch can sustain three games per week, and a fully drained, well maintained pitch may be able to take five. Selection of the best pitches, together with appropriate ground works will produce a stock of efficient pitches.

Planning and Sport & Leisure Context

24. The Playing Pitch Strategy recommends that the Council incorporates the following policies within its County Durham Plan, that:
 - **Safeguarding of Pitches**, existing playing fields are safeguarded, with consideration only given to disposal when a secured pitch stock can be demonstrated, or an alternative high quality provision can be secured through the loss of pitches.
 - **Contributions** towards off site or on-site provision of playing pitches will be sought under the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy. Provision will also be sought for subsequent maintenance costs for a period of fifteen years.
 - **Standards** Durham needs to achieve a minimum standard of 0.72 hectares per 1000 population of accessible playing pitch space within each AAP.

- **Community Use of Schools Sites** The design, layout of pitches and specification of school facilities ensures their suitability for school and community use, with formal community use agreements in place where appropriate.
- **Provision of Hubs** New multi pitch/ multi sport 'hub' sites are developed to provide facilities for a range of training, development and performance sport. Where appropriate, Hub sites should embrace artificial turf pitches technology (ATP) for training and formal fixtures, floodlit multi use games courts, grass pitches and adequate changing facilities
- **Investment** is prioritised on existing multi-pitch sites which can offer secure environments for facilities.
- **Junior Provision** New junior pitches are developed across the County, establishing a minimum of one multi-pitch junior soccer site in each AAP area.
- **Quality** of pitches is achieved by setting a quality standard. Prioritise improvements that increase pitch capacity in areas and sports that are currently most deficient. In addition:
 - i. Increase the use of synthetic pitches for training and where pitch quality unduly limits carrying capacity.
 - ii. Identify a long term framework of ancillary facilities for retention, improvement and disposal.
 - iii. Seek commercial investment to deliver high quality training and performance sports facilities for *5 & 7 a side leagues, Softball, Touch rugby etc*
 - iv. Support development of facilities that provide for growing mid week sports demand, such as 5-a-side soccer and floodlit cricket.
 - v. Ensure that 'hub' or integrated facility developments are reflective of the needs identified within consultation (feedback from clubs) and contribute to the achievement of locally determined sports development targets and priorities.
 - vi. Enable and support the self management of facilities by voluntary sports clubs and other organisations where applicable.
- **Management of facilities** Improve access to facilities through;
 - Providing a central booking system (including both Council and school facilities). Internet booking and feedback should be a long-term goal.
 - Reviewing and rationalising pricing policy including the presumption of a hierarchy of pricing to reflect a hierarchy of facilities.

Conclusions

25. The Playing Pitch Strategy will provide the evidence to support the 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 (including the development of hub sites across the County), and these will be subject to further scrutiny as the County Durham Plan is developed and service provision via colleagues within Sport & Leisure.

26. The adoption of the playing pitch strategy is a significant step towards meeting the objectives of the sport and leisure strategy. By ensuring supply is sufficient to meet demand, now and for the future, and providing a basis on which resources can be targeted to the correct facilities, Sport and Leisure Services will be in a position to work with communities towards increasing participation in sport and physical activity.

Recommendation

27. Cabinet is requested to adopt the Playing Pitch Strategy to assist in determining planning applications, formulate policies within the County Durham Plan, and deliver corporate objectives.

Background papers;

- Playing Pitch Strategy and area profile reports for the Playing Pitch Strategy – available in Member’s library and Cabinet rooms
- Sport and Leisure Services Strategy

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Finance – None.

Staffing – 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. This would have implications on the planning of all communities ensuring that the relationship of new development and the facilities and resources to support this are in line and that projects such as the development of academies and upgrading of schools are delivered in a context which is appropriate to the needs of the community and an appropriate sports provision.

Equality and Diversity – The Playing Pitch Strategy will be subject to an initial screening assessment.

Accommodation – None.

Crime and Disorder – None.

Human Rights – None.

Consultation – the strategy has been prepared alongside partners, town and parish councils, sports clubs and providers.

Procurement – None.

Disability Discrimination Act – None.

Legal Implications – None.