

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PROFORMA**

Cabinet Meeting .....12th November 2015

1. Title of Item/Report

Playing Pitch Strategy

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report on the Playing Pitch Strategy.

As part of the Stockton Council's (SBC) commitment to improving leisure facilities whilst increasing efficiency, the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) was designed and developed to identify investment and rationalisation opportunities pertaining to playing pitch sites across six sports and six different facility types. A copy of the PPS Action Plan was attached to the report.

The purpose of the PPS was:-

“To provide an appropriate number of accessible, high quality and sustainable network of outdoor sports facilities.”

Whilst one of the main drivers for the strategy was to identify potential sites and opportunities for investment into sport, it was also designed to identify sites that had lapsed, were no longer required and could be disposed of to fulfil an alternative purpose.

The Strategy provided a clear, strategic framework for the maintenance and improvement of existing outdoor sports pitches and ancillary facilities between 2015 and 2025. The purpose of the PPS was to help prioritise and target resources where resources were limited.

The PPS covers the following playing pitches and outdoor pitch sports:-

- Football pitches
- Cricket pitches
- Rugby union pitches
- Rugby league pitches
- Artificial grass pitches (AGPs)
- Bowling greens
- Tennis courts

The Strategy was capable of:

- Providing adequate planning guidance to assess development proposals affecting playing fields, as appropriate, directing open space contributions secured through development and informing and shaping local planning policy.
- Inform the protection and provision of sports facilities and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and S106 and CIL schedules.
- Informing land use decisions in respect of future use of existing playing fields (capable of accommodating pitches) across the borough;
- Providing a strategic framework for the provision and management of playing pitches across the borough;
- Supporting external funding bids and maximise support for playing pitch facilities;
- Providing the basis for on-going monitoring and review of the use, distribution, function, quality and accessibility of playing pitches

In order to comply with the planning for sport framework of Sport England, the three main aims of the strategy reflected Sport England's planning aim and objectives for sport. They were:-

- AIM 1 - To protect the existing supply of sports facilities where it is needed for meeting current or future needs
- AIM 2 - To enhance outdoor sports facilities through improving quality and management of sites
- AIM 3 - To provide new outdoor sports facilities where there is current or future demand to do so

The strategic recommendations underpinned the identified three main aims and these were detailed within the report.

The Strategy identified each site across the Borough in each of the identified sports and proposes recommended actions for each of these sites that should be implemented where possible over the life of the Strategy (2015-2025). Although the strategy covered facilities across seven sports and identified many opportunities and challenges, the key opportunities and challenges related to the provision of football pitches. This was not to deny the importance of the other sports merely reflecting the numbers participating and the financial impact upon SBC.

The Borough had sufficient pitches to accommodate the sports pitch needs of residents. However a number of these sites cannot be considered to be in secured community use as they sit on school sites and usage was at the discretion of the school and its governing body. That said with the rebuilding of a number of secondary school sites

including Ian Ramsey and St Michael sites previously not available to the community would become available.

Key Action 1: In support of AIM 1(b) SBC would continue to work with schools to secure greater access as required. This would increase the number of available high quality playing pitch sites for Junior/ adult football without any additional SBC in investment.

Across Stockton-on-Tees there was an over provision of adults grass pitches and an under provision of grass youth and mini pitches to meet demand. However in line with the FA drive to increase usage of artificial grass pitches (AGP's) for junior football, Stockton-on-Tees as a borough has four AGP's (soon to have five) and as such was well placed to meet the needs of junior football clubs both now and in the future.

Upon completion of the planned AGP at Stockton Sixth Form College, the borough would have five AGP's capable of hosting competitive football. This provision would mitigate the short-falls in mini/ junior provision and reduce the requirement for grass pitches.

There was a challenge in this in that old habits die hard and migration from grass to AGP's may not happen as seamlessly as liked. However based on the Sheffield example there was confidence that once teams started to migrate and the quality of the playing surface of AGP's was recognised by junior clubs, then migration of the majority would follow.

Key Action 2A: To deliver a fifth AGP at Stockton 6th Form college. This would ensure that the FA's aspiration for competitive mini / youth football could be effectively delivered within Stockton-on-Tees along with providing additional capacity to support competitive junior / adult football as required.

Key Action 2B: To work with the FA, Sport England and the junior football league (Teesside Junior Football Alliance) to support a migration of mini and youth football from grass onto AGP's as soon as was possible.

Migrating mini / junior football from grass onto AGP's and opening up school sites would increase the number of grass pitches (and associated infrastructure, i.e. changing facilities) available. As a consequence of this action it would enable sites that had lapsed or of relatively poor quality to be taken out of circulation. The sites considered to be lapsed or poor quality were as follows:-

- Former Blakeston School – To be disposed of as per the Cabinet Report – May 2013.
- The Education Centre

- Former Norton School (Lapsed)
- Bluehall Recreation Ground
- Grangefield Recreation Ground
- Darlington Back Lane Recreation Ground
- Yarm Road Recreation Ground

Key Action 3: Develop plans for removing and / or disposing of relevant sites above ensuring that some investment from any disposals was secured for improving existing playing pitch sites.

RESOLVED that the Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan be approved to enable key site investment and rationalisation decisions to be taken.

3. Reasons for the Decision

Implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy will enable key investment and rationalisation decisions to be taken in relation to playing pitch sites. This will lead to the provision of fewer but higher quality playing pitch sites which will better meet the needs of our sporting communities and is in line with key national policy makers.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on 20th November 2015

Proper Officer  
16 November 2015