

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

19th January 2023

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Michael Smith

Playing Pitch Strategy and Outdoor Sport Strategy 2022 - 2025

SUMMARY

As part of the Stockton Council's (SBC) commitment to improving leisure facilities and encourage participation in sport and active leisure, the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS) was designed and developed to identify investment and improvement opportunities across eight sports and different facility types. The development of the strategy has followed relevant Sport England guidance.

The PPOSS provides a strategic framework which describes how playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities across Stockton-on-Tees can meet the needs of existing and future residents of the Borough. It will be used to prioritise and target resources, to stimulate investment into sport and physical activity, and provide an evidence base to support decision making.

The format of the strategy follows guidance set out by Sport England, ensuring that it is acceptable as a basis for planning recommendations where they affect playing pitches and where Sport England will be a statutory consultee.

The PPOSS is specifically written to fulfil the following objectives:

- provide an updated understanding of supply and demand for playing pitches across each site in Stockton-on-Tees
- set out the current and future picture of playing pitch and outdoor sports facility provision across the Borough as a whole, and also within specific neighbourhoods
- identify the key issues that impact on the delivery of playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities

This new strategy will update the existing document (2015) and build on the interim review work carried out in 2019, which maintained our framework and helped secure investment in sports facilities.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

Adoption of the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy will enable investment and rationalisation decisions to be taken in relation to playing pitch sites, based on robust evidence and an understanding of current and future needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet approves the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (POSS) and Action Plan.

DETAIL

1. The Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS), attached in **Appendix 1**, aims to ensure the continued existence of an accessible, high quality and sustainable network of outdoor sports facilities which provide opportunities for all residents.
2. The 2015 Strategy (updated in 2019) assisted the Council in securing investment in a number of facility improvements. These included;
 - The provision of a new 3G AGP at Stockton Town FC and the conversion of the sand based AGP at Northfield Academy to 3G
 - A new World Rugby compliant 3G AGP to support rugby in the area – located at Billingham RUFC
 - The relocation of Stockton RUFC to a new home ground
 - The refurbishment of sand based AGPs to support hockey clubs at Egglecliffe School and Norton Sports Complex
 - Improvements to the quality of several football and rugby pitches through investment into enhanced maintenance via the Pitch Improvement Fund
 - Significant investment into the improvement of cricket grounds and training facilities.
3. The POSS provides an evidence base for funding applications and a framework within which to determine priorities for maintenance and improvement of existing outdoor sports pitches and ancillary facilities, or for potential new facilities, between 2022 and 2025.
4. The PPOSS will support the application of policies protecting playing fields, building on the requirements of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF Paragraph 99) and Sport England's statutory consultee role on planning applications affecting playing field land.
5. Overall, the analysis reveals changing behaviours in some sports and some demand that is not fully met by existing provision. Improvements in provision would support increased participation in organised sport.
6. Adoption of the PPOSS represents an intention to work towards the achievement of its objectives, subject to resources being available.

7. The updated strategy considers the adequacy of existing provision to meet current and projected future need and sets out priorities for a range of facilities for the following sports;
 - Football (grass pitches and 3G)
 - Cricket
 - Rugby Union (grass pitches and 3G)
 - Rugby League (grass pitches and 3G)
 - Hockey
 - Tennis
 - Bowls
 - Athletics
8. Analysis of the needs in relation to each of these sports is broken down into geographic sub-sets of the Borough;
 - **Central and Western** – Stockton-on-Tees, its surrounding suburbs including villages such as Redmarshall and Longnewton.
 - **North** – Billingham and its surrounding suburbs, plus the villages of Wynyard, Thorpe Thewles and Wolviston.
 - **South** –Yarm and Eaglescliffe and their surrounding suburbs, including Kirklevington to the south and rural parishes to the west.
 - **South East** - Ingleby Barwick and Thornaby and the villages of Maltby and Hilton.
9. This breakdown by sport and area provides a very detailed description of needs and opportunities. The evaluation model includes consideration of accessibility and public transport and new provision is only recommended in accessible locations. The subsequent action plan includes a range of options for improvements or alternative provision.

Summary of demand

10. Demand for football has increased. Whilst there are now more 3G Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP), and greater use of these facilities for match play, the increasing demand means that further capacity for football (both grass playing fields and 3G AGPs) is required
11. Participation in cricket remains similar, with a slight increase in adult participation. Although significant qualitative improvement works have taken place, there remain pressures on existing pitches and a requirement for improved ancillary / training facilities
12. Demand for rugby union has increased and despite new facilities being provided for Stockton RUFC, and the renewal of the lease for Billingham RUFC, there remains insufficient capacity overall. This is exacerbated by the recent closure of facilities used by Yarm RUFC
13. There has been a reduction in the number of hockey clubs based in the Borough (following mergers) but there remains a need to accommodate two large Stockton-on-Tees based clubs

14. The quality of facilities for tennis has declined and improvements are now required to public facilities. There remains a strong participation base in the club sector
15. The supply of bowling greens has remained relatively constant, but demand has reduced slightly.

Summary of Key Issues

16. For most sports the future demand for provision identified in Stockton-on-Tees can be met through a combination of
 - Investing in pitch and facility maintenance to better equip the pitches to sustain the required level of use
 - Improving quality to improve the capacity of pitches where this is identified as being required
 - Maximising the sustainability of existing sites, embracing new technological solutions and opportunities to improve the customer journey
 - Securing long term community use – both in terms of access agreements to school sites but also leases for community clubs.
 - Maximising the use of AGPs for competitive play and training (existing pitches and new facilities).
17. For some sports, new provision may be required. To maximise potential participation, new 3G AGPs will be needed (for football and potentially rugby longer term) and there will also be a need for additional capacity for rugby union and rugby league, as well as potentially longer term for cricket.
18. Where opportunities are available to provide football pitches on large scale new developments, we should seek to provide toilet and changing facilities.
19. The effect of climate change on our weather increases the frequency of flood and drought conditions, which tend to make grass pitches unplayable, impacting on the sustainability of fixtures, leagues and training. Artificial surfaces are less susceptible to flood and drought. In addition, improvements for grass pitches to address the impacts of climate change could include rainwater harvesting and drainage.
20. Officers will work through the Action Plan and bring forward proposals for improvements or new facilities as resources become available, including those resources that arise from new property development.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

This strategy will benefit the entire community and should not have any direct impact upon the financial or social structure.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

This report does not contain corporate parenting implications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan does not in itself represent a resource commitment.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

A full risk assessment will be produced for each 'on the ground' action, to be included within each project plan.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

The PPOSS will have a direct impact on all wards within the Borough.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1-PPOSS Strategy and Action Plan, December 2022

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