

**COUNCILLOR GEORGE
DAVIES**

CABINET MEMBER FOR
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY
SAFETY AND DEPUTY LEADER
OF THE COUNCIL

DELEGATED REPORT

**REVISED PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY
FOR WIRRAL**

REPORT SUMMARY

National planning policy requires the Council to prepare a Playing Pitch Strategy to provide background evidence on the use and demand for playing pitches; to guide decision-making; promote investment to improve their quality and quantity; and inform protection through the land-use planning system.

The Strategy must be prepared in line with a national methodology published by Sport England, the statutory consultation body for planning applications involving playing pitches.

The Council's previous Playing Pitch Strategy was approved in 2004. A revised Strategy has now been prepared based on the latest survey information for pitch sports, tennis courts and bowling greens, with the full involvement of the relevant Governing Bodies and Sport England.

The Strategy is in two parts: an Assessment Report, setting out the latest background information for each sport; and a Strategy and Action Plan, setting out a series of initial recommendations for further consideration by a Steering Group, which will be chaired by the Council's Strategic Hub.

The Strategy shows that there is still strong and increasing demand for the use of a full range of facilities. There is a particular shortage of football pitches across the Borough, as well as more localised shortfalls for cricket and rugby union and growing demand for hockey. Demand for bowls and tennis is currently being met, although qualitative improvements for tennis will be required in the future.

The Strategy goes on to conclude that there is a need to protect levels of provision; improve quality where possible, to create additional capacity; and, if viable, create access to school sites or bring some disused sites back into use, if the needs identified are to be fully met.

The revised Strategy will support Wirral Plan pledges related to leisure opportunities for all; helping residents to live healthier; and will contribute towards an attractive local environment; and delivers one of the agreed actions of the Wirral Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

The Strategy will provide essential evidence for the Council's emerging Local Plan; can be used to support bids by the Council and by individual clubs and teams for additional resources for the improvement of local facilities; and will be used to secure contributions from developers in relevant planning applications.

This report therefore recommends that the findings of the revised Strategy are approved and that Council is recommended to adopt the revised Strategy as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and in other decisions taken under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

A summary of the area-based findings are attached at Appendix 1 to this report and Ward and site-specific information is set out in both the Assessment Report (provided at Appendix 2 to this report) and the Strategy and Action Plan (provided at Appendix 3 to this report).

The recommendations are a key decision because the Strategy will have Borough wide implications and will be a significant consideration when finalising the Council's Local Plan and when determining planning applications with implications for playing pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet Member is requested to:

- (1) Approve the findings of the Assessment Report and Strategy and Action Plan attached to this report; and**
- (2) Recommend to Council the adoption of the Assessment Report and the accompanying Strategy and Action Plan as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and in other decisions under the Town and Country Planning Acts; and**
- (3) Request officers to publish the Assessment Report and the accompanying Strategy and Action Plan on the Council's website, to further inform the Council's review of options for the Core Strategy Local Plan.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To adopt an updated strategy for the provision and improvement of playing pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens, based on the latest information on use and demand, to meet the requirements of national policy and guidance.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 There are no realistic alternative options.
- 2.2 A failure to prepare and approve an up-to-date playing pitch strategy would limit the Council's ability to protect playing fields, bowling greens and tennis courts from development; to secure external funding for improved or replacement facilities; and to meet the requirements of national planning policy.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The protection of sports facilities is a national priority.

- 3.2 National planning policy states that:

“Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required” (National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paragraph 73 refers).

- 3.3 NPPF Paragraph 74 also states that:

“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- *an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- *the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- *the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.”*

- 3.4 The Council last prepared a Playing Pitch Strategy for the Borough in 2004 (Cabinet, 21 April 2004, Minute 640).

- 3.5 The revised Strategy for Wirral has been prepared in accordance with national guidance, which was last revised by Sport England in October 2013.

- 3.6 The revised Strategy, attached to this report, comprises an Assessment Report with an associated Strategy and Action Plan.
- 3.7 The Assessment Report (provided at Appendix 2 to this report) presents information on the ownership, management, distribution, availability and current use of sports pitches and facilities throughout the Borough. It also sets out an analysis of trends in participation and includes a summary of club consultation and the key issues for each particular sport.
- 3.8 The Strategy and Action Plan (provided at Appendix 3 to this report) sets out a proposed framework for the provision of outdoor sports facilities between 2016 and 2022, which includes a series of site-specific recommendations in the form of a series of initial area-specific action plans, which will be kept under review by a Pitch Strategy Steering Group chaired by the Council's Strategic Hub.
- 3.9 A summary of the area-based findings of the Strategy, for each sport, is provided at Appendix 1 to this report. The general conclusion is that the provision of sports pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens should be managed to accommodate demand; and improvements to quality and capacity should, where possible, be sought and secured.
- 3.10 The formal adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy will enable facility providers, including the Council and voluntary sector, and grant funding agencies to identify and verify appropriate local priorities and will help the Council and other sports providers and users to secure additional funding to support improvements to the existing range of facilities. It will also allow the Council to secure appropriate contributions from developers in relevant planning applications.
- 3.11 Cabinet on 27 February 2017 (Minute 96), as part of the Council's review of options for the Core Strategy Local Plan, resolved that the future designation of existing open spaces is not determined until the Playing Pitch Strategy has been completed and approved. It is therefore recommended that the approved Playing Pitch Strategy is published on the Council's website, to further inform that review.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The preparation of the Pitch Strategy was authorised and funded from existing resources via the Council's Parks and Countryside Service.
- 4.2 The Strategy will be used by the Council, by Sports Governing Bodies and by individual sports clubs and teams, to support applications to secure additional external funding that would not otherwise be available in the absence of an approved up-to-date strategy.
- 4.3 The Strategy will also enable the Council to secure additional private investment through developer contributions when planning applications are being considered and legal agreements negotiated.
- 4.4 Any further financial commitments arising from the adoption of the Strategy, including projects listed in the initial Action Plan, will need to be further assessed

on a case by case basis and will be reported separately for approval as they arise.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations, including national policy, indicate otherwise.
- 5.2 The formal adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy as a material planning consideration will enable the Strategy to carry significant weight in future planning decisions under the Town and County Planning Acts and as evidence for the Council's emerging Core Strategy Local Plan.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The Strategy has been prepared by specialist sports consultants Knight Kavanagh and Page (KKP), assisted by a Steering Group of Council officers from Parks and Countryside; Asset Management; Sports Development; Physical Education; and Planning; National Governing Bodies; and Sport England; with further information provided by local league representatives and a comprehensive survey of pitch and facility users.
- 6.2 The approval of the Strategy, which has been endorsed by Sport England, should reduce the time and cost involved in the determination of planning applications involving playing pitches, bowling greens and tennis courts.
- 6.3 The data underlying the preparation of the Strategy will be held and analysed using the Council's ICT facilities.
- 6.4 The Strategy and Action Plan will continue to be monitored by a Steering Group comprising Council officers and representatives of sports Governing Bodies, chaired by the Council's Strategic Hub.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 A failure to adopt an up-to-date Playing Pitch Strategy could prevent both the Council and facility users from securing resources to provide and improve playing pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens; and would restrict the Council's ability to protect and improve these facilities or secure developer contributions through the statutory land use planning system.
- 7.2 While there is no direct risk to the Council in adopting the Strategy, the Strategy may have implications if the Council needed to dispose of surplus or disused sports facilities on the Council's own sites.
- 7.3 The Strategy will also serve to de-risk future decisions, by enabling the Council to be clear on the likely stance of statutory consultation body Sport England, when the future of sports pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens are being considered, allowing for the more efficient use of Council resources.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT / CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Strategy has been prepared with the direct involvement of National Governing Bodies, local league representatives and Sport England, including a survey of pitch and facility users.
- 8.2 The content of the Assessment Report and the Strategy and Action Plan has been approved by the relevant National Governing Bodies and by statutory consultation body Sport England.
- 8.3 The application of the findings from the Strategy will, however, need to be subject to further separate consultation, on a site by site basis, as and when required.
- 8.4 It is recommended that the approved Assessment Report and Strategy and Action Plan is published on the Council's website, to further inform the Council's review of options for the Core Strategy Local Plan.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Strategy and Action Plan should have no negative impacts for staff or service users under the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 9.2 The relevant Equality Impact Assessment can be viewed at <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2017/delivery>

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APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 – Map of Analysis Areas & Summary of Findings
Appendix 2 – Assessment Report (May 2016)
Appendix 3 – Strategy and Action Plan (August 2016)

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Sport England's Planning Policy Statement: A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England can be viewed at <http://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-applications/playing-field-land/>

Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance can be viewed at <http://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance/playing-pitch-strategy-guidance/>

The National Planning Policy Framework can be viewed at <http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/> (paragraphs 178 to 181 refer)

National Planning Policy Guidance on open space and sports and recreation facilities can be viewed at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet – Core Strategy Local Plan – Report of Further Consultation on Housing Need and Land Supply	27 February 2017 (Minute 96)