

Swindon Borough Playing Pitch Strategy

Cabinet

Date: 7th February 2018

Author: Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability
Cabinet Member for Communities and Place
Acting Director for Communities and Housing

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To seek approval for the adoption of the Swindon Borough Playing Pitch Strategy (SPPS), as part of the evidence base to inform future planning policy (including the Local Plan Review), and to assist as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications where appropriate.
- 1.2 Paragraph 73 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires the Council to base Local Plan policies on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs and opportunities for open space and recreation. The Local Plan Review is at an early stage and the SPPS will be used to inform it. It will also directly support the implementation of the adopted Local Plan policies ensuring that appropriate protection is given to existing playing pitches, and new and improved pitches and facilities can be secured through the planning process.
- 1.3 The SPPS is closely aligned to the One Swindon Priority, “Everyone is enjoying sport, leisure and cultural opportunities”. It will particularly deliver against the following outcomes: “Improve health and wellbeing for all by increasing and widening participation in sports, leisure and culture” and “More young people are supported to take part in sports, leisure and culture”.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the Swindon Borough SPPS and Assessment Report, and to publish it in accordance with the arrangements set out in paragraph 3.22.
- 2.2 To approve the SPPS Steering Group, comprising of Council Officers, representatives from the sport’s National Governing Bodies, Sport England and local league representatives for the grass sports, to oversee implementation of the Strategy.
- 2.3 Authorise the Head of Planning, Regulatory Services and Heritage and the Director of Law and Democratic Services to undertake further work to support implementation of the SPPS and make any minor changes, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability and the Cabinet Member for Communities and Place prior to publication.

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- 2.4 Authorise the Head of Planning, Regulatory Services, and Heritage to carry out any consultation that may be required for a future review of the SPPS and bring a report in respect of the review to Cabinet for consideration.

3. Detail

- 3.1 A Playing Pitch Strategy is a document which plays a number of important roles in sports, leisure and planning terms. It provides a strategic framework for the provision and management of outdoor sports and is capable of informing planning decisions, supporting funding applications and ensuring on-going monitoring and review of outdoor sport to meet strategic objectives e.g. physical activity participation, volunteering and engagement.
- 3.2 A strategy is required for the following reasons:
- 3.2.1 to provide robust evidence to protect existing playing pitches and playing fields where this is justified by consistently applied evidence;
 - 3.2.2 to help improve the quality of offer and provision by identifying and quantifying issues relating to the quality of pitches and ancillary facilities;
 - 3.2.3 to support applications for funding by clubs, teams and pitch providers for the improvement of the quality, quantity and accessibility (the 'usability') of provision;
 - 3.2.4 to help to defend against inappropriate development or loss of pitches without appropriate alternative provision;
 - 3.2.5 to inform planning policy development;
 - 3.2.6 to provide a strategic view and options for the provision of pitches during the strategy period; and
 - 3.2.7 to inform decision making in relation to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 agreements.
- 3.3 This Swindon Borough SPPS would replace the last strategy produced in 2007 and would cover the period to 2021. The Council has worked with Sport England to analyse the currently available provision and develop a series of actions to ensure unmet and future demand can be met. A copy of the Strategy is included as **Appendix 1**.
- 3.4 The strategy focuses on football, rugby union, cricket and hockey pitches (and on both grass and artificial surfaces) and also provides a brief assessment of the needs of other, less played sports in the Borough of rugby league, American football and softball.

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- 3.5 The SPPS is a technical document which has been shaped and overseen by a steering group, which includes Council officers from Parks, Leisure, and Planning, representatives from the relevant National and County sports governing bodies, Sport England, Wiltshire and Swindon Sports Partnership, and the Swindon Sports Forum.
- 3.6 The Strategy has been informed by a comprehensive Playing Pitch Assessment Report which presents information on the ownership, management, distribution, availability and current use of sports pitches and facilities throughout the Borough. The information used in the assessment was collected by Borough Council officers over a period of 12 months during 2016 to ensure that data could be captured for all sports and pitch types during the season when the sports are played. On-site quality assessments were undertaken on all pitches, both public and private, in accordance with sport-specific criteria set out in Sport England's guidance. Ward Members have been sent the draft report, and given the opportunity to comment. One response was received from Councillor Milner-Barry, Ward Councillor for Old Town and East Wichel. Full details of the comments, alongside the officer response and any changes made to the Strategy in response to the comments is contained within **Appendix 3**.
- 3.7 The Assessment Report also sets out an analysis of trends in participation and population growth, and includes a summary of club consultation and the key issues for each particular sport. Due to its size, the Assessment Report and its related appendices is available to view on the Council's website as part of the Cabinet agenda.
- 3.8 The main findings for each sport are summarised below:

Football

- 3.8.1 Supply currently meets demand although there is increasing reliance on unsecure community use pitches. There are a number of grass pitches that suffer from a high number of match cancellations due to waterlogging of the pitch/poor drainage during periods of wet weather.
- 3.8.2 There is a lack of full size 3G pitches with secure community use which could support match play/training and reduce damage to traditional grass pitches during periods of wet weather, with all secure community use 3G pitches being small or half size.

Hockey

- 3.8.3 Supply currently meets demand from Swindon's two clubs, albeit on unsecure community use Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs). This presents a risk to certainty of future use. One pitch currently used by one hockey club is of poor quality (Isambard).

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Cricket

3.8.4 Taking current demand into account and comparing to supply, there is some spare capacity on secure use grass pitches, however secure use artificial pitches are currently overused. There is a desire for teams to move use from unsecure to secure sites.

Rugby Union

3.8.5 There are currently significant levels of overplay on secure community use pitches used by the two clubs (Swindon Supermarine RFC and Swindon RFC) with their own home ground. One club, Swindon Old Boys RFC, are without a permanent home ground on a secure community use site.

Other Sports

3.8.6 Both American Football and Rugby League share use of rugby union pitches and do not have a permanent sole use ground. At present, Softball's needs are catered for at their current site.

3.9 The Assessment Report has been translated into a Strategy providing the Council with a series of strategic recommendations which provide a framework for the improvement and maintenance of existing playing pitch stock, and provision of additional pitch sites to meet demand going forward.

3.10 The strategic recommendations made by the SPPS fall into one of three categories:

3.10.1 Protect - for example through protective planning policies and securing the tenure of sports clubs;

3.10.2 Enhance - for example pitch improvement measures such as drainage, improvements to the quality of changing and other ancillary facilities, and securing CIL monies towards the upgrade and management of existing outdoor sports and recreation provision; and

3.10.3 Provide - for example remarking of pitches to increase capacity, securing long term community usage at sites not currently available for community use, and (subject to relevant planning policy) the development of new pitches such as 'hub' sites.

3.11 The Strategy also provides a series of sport by sport recommendations which provide a strategic framework for sport led improvements to provision. A summary of the findings and recommendation for each sport is included as **Appendix 2** to this report.

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Consultation

- 3.12 Consultation is a key part of the Strategy's development, and has been undertaken in line with the advice given in the Sport England guidance. In addition to ongoing communication with members of the Steering Group, early in the process online and paper surveys were sent to clubs, pitch owners, pitch managers and pitch providers (including Parish Councils, schools and private providers) to ascertain baseline information about quality, accessibility, demand for pitches and ancillary facilities and other important issues of concern. Face-to-face meetings were also undertaken with some of the larger sports clubs, and on-site meetings with those managing and maintaining sites during the pitch audit process. Furthermore, wider email contact was undertaken with neighbouring authorities to ascertain any cross-boundary demand.
- 3.13 As the Strategy development progressed, some pitches have been subject to possible transfer from Swindon Borough Council to newly formed Parish Councils. The Assessment Report and Strategy have sought to recognise the most up-to-date position on the possible transfer through early engagement with the new Parishes after their formation.
- 3.14 The draft Strategy and associated documents were also circulated as part of a targeted consultation exercise with all parties who were engaged as part of the data collection, as detailed above, as well as all Ward Councillors and the Council's Public Health Officers. This targeted consultation took place over a six week period between the 30th August and the 11th October 2017.
- 3.15 A total of six responses were received on the draft SPPS. Full details of these comments, alongside the officer response and any changes made to the Strategy in response to the comments is contained within **Appendix 3**.
- 3.16 In order to meet future demand, the Strategy identifies locations where the quantity and quality of provision can be enhanced to meet current and future demand for each sport, for example through securing community use on unsecure sites or sites with no current community use and improvements to pitches/ancillary facilities. The Strategy also identifies opportunities for 'hub' sites (larger quality multi-sport sites) through improvements to existing multi-pitch sites, for example at Moredon Recreation Ground, and/or strategic development allocations where they generate a need for strategic outdoor sports. Specific site recommendations can be found in section 10-15 of the Strategy.
- 3.17 The Strategy sets out a direction of travel with a number of detailed actions and recommendations which will need to be planned for, delivered and monitored during the strategy period. The strategy cannot do the work necessary, for example, logistical, feasibility and viability work, required to confirm actions and make things happen on the ground, which is the task of the many stakeholders

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and bodies which may be responsible for delivery of pitches and facilities following the strategy's adoption.

- 3.18 The Strategy does not suggest that the Council should fill any identified shortfalls or fund and/or deliver and/or maintain future pitch provision. The Council would work with delivery partners and stakeholders to help plan for and facilitate the delivery of new pitches and facilities across the Borough where this is appropriate. The Strategy therefore requires the Steering Group members each to continue to play an important role in helping to deliver the strategy's recommendations.

Next Steps

- 3.19 The formal adoption of the SPPS by the Council would mark the final step of its development stage in accordance with Sport England's Guidance. Adoption of the SPPS would ensure its status is recognised across all relevant departments and will aid its delivery, giving it sufficient weight in related decisions affecting the future of playing pitches.
- 3.20 Subject to the Cabinet's decision, the next stage would be to publicise the adoption of the documents on the Council's website.
- 3.21 Following adoption, it is proposed that the existing partnership Steering Group is continued to govern the delivery of the Strategy. Liaison with other local facility providers, such as parishes and local education establishments, will also be required where appropriate.
- 3.22 Details within the Strategy and site by site assessments can quickly change due to a variety of factors such as sports clubs moving or folding or the progression of site improvements. This Strategy should therefore be considered to be a "live" document and subject to regular review. This is a requirement of Sport England and the relevant National Governing Bodies. It is recommended that the Strategy is reviewed after a period of three years, or before, if substantive changes take place that may influence supply or demand during the strategy period.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Borough Council could choose not to adopt the SPPS. However, failure to adopt a SPPS would limit the ability of the Council to secure developer contributions and funding to support the development and delivery of playing pitch provision in the Borough.

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5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 The Council commissioned external consultants Stuart Todd Associates to write the Strategy on its behalf and the costs of this have already been committed to the Forward Planning budget.
- 5.2 There are no direct financial implications as part of the SPPS itself. The Strategy provides an ongoing planning document that allows the strategic improvement and development of sports pitches to be delivered by a multitude of partners and funding bodies. It will be for the Steering Group to work with local clubs, sports associations, town and parish councils to support developments, developers to recognise the strategic need for their developer contributions, and for the Council to identify the best use of S106 and CIL funding and therefore secure the appropriate contributions from developers.
- 5.3 In the future, there may be requests for contributory funding for individual projects as they are developed. Any investment required to deliver any recommendations identified in these documents will need to be further assessed on a case by case basis and subject to the standard project feasibility / business case protocols and considered against available funding before being agreed.
- 5.4 There may be additional financial costs for the future review and update of the data which underpins the strategy. The frequency and extent of this will need to be determined through liaison with Sport England, the responsible body for determining the validity of local playing pitch strategies.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.5 Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations, including national policy, indicate otherwise. The formal adoption of the SPPS 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 emerging Local Plan Review.
- 5.6 Other legal and human rights implications were taken into account in preparing the report. It is considered that the report's recommendations are compatible with Convention Rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.7 Once adopted, the SPPS will have a positive effect on sustainability in Swindon Borough, providing a framework for protection, enhancement and provision of playing pitches in the Borough for the next five years. It will also provide a good

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foundation for the ongoing consideration of playing pitches through future updates to the Strategy.

- 5.8 The Borough's playing pitches support high levels of both sport and physical activity and as such contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing of the population.
- 5.9 The SPPS is a key evidence base document for the review of the Local Plan. The Council has a duty to ensure that the preparation of the Local Plan is in accordance with the sustainability principles of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 5.10 The Local Plan Review will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment and Health Impact Assessment to ensure that the impact of proposals can be minimised, with the least negative impact possible on the Plan area.

Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA)

- 5.11 Sporting activity can help to break down barriers that exclude individuals and communities from achieving their potential. The provision of the right sporting facilities (right location and right quality) will increase the participation of Swindon residents in sport with benefits for both health and equalities objectives of the Council.
- 5.12 A Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed. Potential adverse impacts on low income groups were identified, on the basis that sites with a mix of different providers may involve more commercial arrangements being adopted. This will be mitigated through the Council closely monitoring and managing outcomes to ensure all services remain accessible to the community. No adverse impacts were identified on the basis of age, disability, sex, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, marital/civil partnership status or pregnancy/maternity. A copy of the DIA with more detailed information can be obtained from the report author.

Risk Management

- 5.13 A delay in adopting the SPPS will result in the Council failing to utilise the most recent and up to date evidence available to it. This may result in the Council determining planning applications and formulating policy on out of date information and evidence. Planning application decisions and draft planning policies are likely to be considered inadequate by Planning Inspectors if based on old information.
- 5.14 A delay in the adoption of the SPPS may also have detrimental implications in the securing of funding opportunities and developer contributions for new/improved pitch based sports facilities.

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6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1: Swindon Borough Playing Pitch Strategy (*The appendix is available online at the Council's website or on request from Committee and Member Services*).
- 8.2 Appendix 2: Summary of Sport by Sport Findings and Recommendations (*The appendix is available online at the Council's website or on request from Committee and Member Services*).
- 8.3 Appendix 3: Consultation Comments with Recorded Changes (*The appendix is available online at the Council's website or on request from Committee and Member Services*).

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme

- 9.1 This is not a Key Decision.