

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 16 September 2021

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - Enterprise, Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Employment, Learning, Skills and Community & Environment and Urban Renewal

SUBJECT: Playing Pitch Strategy

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the Board's approval to Halton's Playing Pitch Strategy 2021 – 2037 (Appendix 1).

1.2 The Strategy is in two parts: an Assessment Report, (Appendix 2) 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.

1.3 Haltons Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) sets out the Council's strategy for identifying and meeting the playing pitch and associated facility needs of the Borough from now through to 2037. It considers how well the existing playing pitch provision and associated facilities meet the needs of communities in terms of supply and demand throughout this time period.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS: It is recommended that:

- 1) the Assessment Report and the accompanying Strategy and Action Plan be approved;
- 2) the Assessment Report and the accompanying Strategy and Action Plan be published on the Council's website; and
- 3) the Halton Playing Pitch Strategy 2021 – 2037 be the basis for making strategic decisions on future playing pitch provision and associated facilities across the Borough.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council commissioned Knight, Kavanagh and Page Ltd (KKP), specialist sport and leisure consultancy to produce a Playing Pitch Strategy for Halton.

- 3.2 The strategy has been produced in accordance with national planning guidance using the Sport England Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance. The guidance is very rigid in its approach and provides robust and objective justification for future playing pitch provision throughout Halton.
- 3.3 The National Governing Bodies of Sport and Sport England were members of the Council led steering group and were required to sign off the strategy.
- 3.4 The PPS identifies key areas of improvement to address the needs of the different sports and actions to improve existing sites.
- 3.5 The draft PPS formed part of the evidence base required for the emerging Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (DALP), recently considered through the Examination in Public.
- 3.6 The PPS provides an audit of the quality, quantity and accessibility of playing pitches, establishes current levels of demand and whether pitches are being over/under-used.
- 3.7 Using population forecasts, the PPS projects forward demand likely to arise by the end of the strategy period so that the appropriate level of pitch provision can be planned and developed for the future.
- 3.8 The strategy is an enabling document and so does not commit the Council or any other body to funding any of the actions identified.
- 3.9 The Council and its partners are committed to supporting residents to be active.

4.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 The strategy is set in the context of the council's corporate plans and sets out how the PPS can help deliver the corporate objectives. It also looks at the changing national picture and priorities for sports and physical activity.
- 4.2 The Site by Site Action Plan identifies there is a need to either protect, provide or enhance existing facilities to address projected deficiencies over the lifespan of the strategy (2021 - 2037). The majority of sites have recommendations to maximise use through improved pitch quality and maintenance. There is also a need to secure long-term community use at some sites, such as schools, to sustain and grow affiliated sport and informal play.
- 4.3 Sports included in the strategy are:

Priority Sports

- Football
- Cricket
- Rugby League

- Rugby Union
- Hockey

Other Pitch Sports

- American Football
- Baseball

- 4.4 There is a general requirement to improve pitch quality, especially for grass playing pitches as well as improve the quality of changing provision located alongside pitches. Both poor pitch quality and poor quality changing room provision have a detrimental effect on participation in sport and therefore, is a key issue to address.
- 4.5 The current position for all pitch sports is either demand is being met or that there is a shortfall. The future position shows the creation of shortfalls for some pitch types and in some areas where demand is currently being met as well as the exacerbation of existing shortfalls.
- 4.6 Where shortfalls are not present and demand is being met, this does not necessarily equate to a surplus of provision, with any spare capacity instead considered a solution to overcoming the identified shortfalls. As such, there is a resultant need to protect all existing playing pitch provision until all demand is met, or there is a requirement to replace provision in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 4.7 There are current shortfalls of 3G pitches, senior rugby union pitches and senior and junior rugby league pitches as well as adult, youth 11v11 and youth 9v9 football pitches. When taking into consideration future demand, existing shortfalls worsen and additional shortfalls arise on mini 5v5 football pitches, cricket pitches (for both senior and junior play) and senior rugby league pitches.
- 4.8 The shortfalls evidenced are relatively minimal when compared to other local authorities nationally. As such, it is considered that shortfalls can be alleviated through the better utilisation of existing provision, such as via pitch re-configuration, improving quality and encouraging or enabling access to unused/unavailable provision. This is particularly the case in relation to football, rugby union and rugby league.
- 4.9 In contrast, a shortfall of 3G pitches can only be met through increased provision. With resources to improve the quality of grass pitches being limited, an increase in 3G provision could also help reduce grass pitch shortfalls through the transfer of play, thus reducing overplay, which in turn can aid pitch quality improvements.
- 4.10 For cricket, in addition to sustaining and improving the quality of existing provision to reduce shortfalls, there is also a need for additional facilities. However, this does not necessarily mean new squares are required. Instead, non-turf pitches (NTPs) could be created to accompany grass wickets or lapsed/disused provision could be reinstated.

- 4.11 Whilst there is a suitable stock of hockey suitable AGPs, there are issues with quality which needs to be resolved. If this does not occur, there will be a need to create a new pitch to cater for demand.
- 4.12 In addition to the many grass roots sport clubs active in the borough, the Council works closely with local partner organisations, such as, Widnes Vikings and Everton Ladies. Some clubs play on Council owned playing pitches and do have active community / grassroots sport development and engagement programmes. They demonstrate willingness to work in partnership for the benefit of the borough.
- 4.13 The PPS provides Planning Officers with an assessment tool and evidence to help protect, mitigate for loss and lever developer contributions towards planned facilities to meet the future needs of a growing population.
- 4.14 All proposed developments for alternative use of playing field land would need to refer to the PPS to help determine what impact the development will have on the current supply and demand of playing field facilities in the area. If alternative plans are to be brought forward, a mitigation plan will need to be agreed and signed off by Sport England and relevant NGB's as statutory consultees for replacement of loss of recreational green space and / or playing field land. In this case, a sum will be agreed to re-provide and /or improve sport facilities in the locality area.
- 4.15 The PPS also highlights the need to ensure adequate provision for increased demand generated by housing developments. Sport England use the evidence base from Playing Pitch Strategy and Indoor Leisure Strategies to help determine what impact the new development will have on the demand and capacity of existing sites in the area, and whether there is a need for improvements to increase capacity, or if new provision is required. If there is a case for improvements or new provision, a Section 106 agreement and sum towards the required provision will be agreed before planning approval is granted.
- 4.16 On an annual basis, a review of the PPS will be undertaken and any significant changes reported to Executive Board, to ensure that identified local priorities continue to be achieved. Member engagement will be sought to ensure the local plans are kept up to date.
- 4.17 Officers will be delegated to engage with partners/organisations and tasked with presenting site specific business case and investment plans, for consideration for inclusion in the Councils Capital Programme.

5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The protection of sports facilities is a national priority.
- 5.2 The formal adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy will enable the Strategy to carry significant weight in future planning decisions and as evidence for

the Council's emerging Local Plan.

- 5.3 The PPS can support Climate Change objectives in a number of ways. Principally, through partnership working, improving health and wellbeing and supporting, infrastructure and skills.

6.0 **FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 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

- 6.2 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.

- 6.3 The 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.

7.0 **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 High quality and appropriate places to play sport and be active are important in delivering increased participation in sport and physical activity, which is part of the foundation of improving health and wellbeing among Halton residents. However, it is not enough just to have the right facilities in the right places, they also need to be programmed and priced appropriately to ensure that activities are appropriate for specific target groups and that cost is not a barrier to access. The benefits gained from participation and being active contributes towards achieving wider council priorities.

- 7.2 An asset-based approach does not ignore the challenge faced by the borough: Borough activity levels are below county, regional and national averages, as identified in [Active Lives](#). Its 2019/20 survey identifies that 39.8% of adults aged 16+ in Halton are doing less than 30 minutes activity per week. This is a higher level of inactivity than the county (30.6%), regional (29.5%) and national (27.1%) averages.

8.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

- 8.1 There is a risk associated with not having open spaces.

- 8.2 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, it would restrict the Council's ability to protect and improve these facilities or secure developer contributions through the statutory land use planning system.

8.3 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.

9.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

9.1 The Strategy and Action Plan should have no negative impacts for staff or Service users.

10.0 **REASON(S) FOR DECISION**

10.1 It is important that the Council have an up to date audit and review of all the outdoor sports assets and outdoor facilities including those managed by others.

10.2 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.

11.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.