

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 24th October 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment & Regeneration

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

SUBJECT: Playing Pitch Strategy Update report 2024

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To present an assessment of the current provision of sports pitches within the Borough and identify what the anticipated future demand in terms of quality and quantity of pitches will be by 2037 to meet demand using Sport England methodology. The report identifies a long-term level of provision for the Council and others to work towards.
- 1.2 It should be noted that the actions in this strategy do not commit the Council or its partners to the funding, provision, or management of sites. The recommended actions will be used as a guide for investment.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS: That

- 1) the report be noted; and**
- 2) the Board approves the Playing Pitch Strategy Update Report 2024, including the updated site action plan. This is based upon consultation undertaken by sports provision consultants Knight Kavanagh Page in 2024.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Halton Playing Pitch Strategy was adopted by the Council in September 2021 (Exec Board item 31). Its purpose was to provide a strategic framework for the maintenance and improvement of outdoor sports pitches, and ancillary facilities.

- 3.2 The 2024 Playing Pitch Strategy update report presented was prepared by Knight Kavanagh & Page in consultation with partners including Halton Sports Partnership, Sport England, and the National Governing Bodies of relevant sports. It was prepared in accordance with relevant Sport England guidance.
- 3.3 Variation in demand will be experienced through 2021-2037 period with changing age and gender mixes playing requiring a different mix and number of pitch sizes. Through regular review and amendment of the provision of pitches demand will be accommodated, moving towards the long term identified provision.
- 3.4 The update report sets out the changes in the demand for and supply of playing pitches in Halton since the previous annual update was conducted by the Council in 2023. The baseline data is taken from the Halton Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) 2020. The 2024 update report covers the pitch sports of Cricket, Football, Hockey, Rugby League and Rugby Union; and Baseball and American Football.
- 3.5 The report 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.
- 3.6 The report is an enabling document and so does not commit the Council or any other body to funding any of the actions identified.
- 3.7 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). Most 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.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report provides an update on the key strategy findings, sport specific and strategic recommendations which apply across the outdoor sporting infrastructure. The evidence base created provides a robust and objective justification for future playing pitch provision that will be implemented into planning policy and other relevant corporate strategies to enable local policies, planning and sport development criteria to work efficiently and effectively.
- 4.2 PPS will be the key document used by the Halton Planning Authority when considering planning applications in consultation with Sport England as a statutory consultee, who in turn will consult with National Governing Bodies of Sport as appropriate.

4.3 The protection of sports facilities is a national priority.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Any on-going revenue costs, in respect of Council owned pitches, would need to be met from within approved budgets. The Environment Open Space Team budget has seen significant pressure, the Council lacks the resources to invest and make significant improvements to its playing pitch stock.

5.2 The financial commitments arising from the adoption of the updated report, 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.

5.3 The report 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.

5.4 The report will also enable the Council to secure additional private investment through developer contributions when planning applications are being considered and legal agreements negotiated.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence.

The report notes that due to the pandemic there is increased importance on participation in physical activity for the prevention of ill-health and the need to break down barriers to accessing physical activity.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Place shaping to deliver desirable places to live includes spaces to be active where you live, playing fields are an integral part of the infrastructure that supports the delivery of sport which contributes to Halton's economy.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Playing fields are more than green spaces, they are places where people's lives can be improved physically, mentally and socially.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

The borough has a number of deprived wards that are supported with access to playing fields, this supports the wider agenda of access to opportunities and improving life chances.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

The Council's approach seeks environmentally sustainable

maintenance and development of playing pitches and facilities.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

The report contains information to inform the Council and its partners that protects, provides, and enhances playing fields for community use.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There is a risk associated with not having open spaces. Without clear evidence from the PPS, the Council would be susceptible to challenge from developers.

7.2 A failure to keep the PPS up to date 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.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There will be a positive impact as the report promotes physical and mental wellbeing for all. Further assessments will need to be conducted in relation to recommended action.

8.2 Consultation was undertaken by KKP on behalf of the Council, with consultation taking place with National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGB's), local clubs and groups.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The report does not give specific recommendations for climate change and environment however, it identifies opportunities to prioritise and support the upgrade of ancillary facilities such as changing rooms, to accommodate improved utilities services and improved efficiency within any new or upgraded development.

9.2 There will be opportunities to encourage more sustainable approaches which have a positive carbon impact alongside other benefits to facility improvement schemes and community-led activities.

9.3 Delivery of priority projects identified in the Site Action Plan will contribute to achieving the zero-carbon target for Halton. All projects will be subject to individual business case and agreed funding strategy.

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

Halton Playing Pitch Strategy 2021 – 2037 (Executive Board
21.09.21 item 31)