



**REPORT FROM: NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES MANAGER**

**TO: EXECUTIVE**

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## **PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To provide the Executive with detail of the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) for Pendle, Burnley and Rossendale with a view to approving the document and the recommendations set out in it.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) That the PPS be approved as a 'live' working document for strategically guiding Pendle's playing pitch and ancillary facility development and improvement over the next 10 years.
- (2) That the document be referred for information to the Transfer of Services and Facilities to Town and Parish Councils Committee as important background to decisions on transfer of sports pitches and also circulated to all Town and Parish Councils with the aim of obtaining buy in from them in terms of the recommendations and delivery of the actions.

### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) The PPS will provide a strategic guide for the Council over the next 10 years in terms of playing pitch development, improvement and investment.
- (2) In view of the potential transfer of sports pitches/playing fields to Town and Parish Councils over the next 2-3 years, it is imperative that the strategy and its recommendations/actions are taken on board by them thereby ensuring the development and improvement of playing pitches in the long term is forthcoming.

## BACKGROUND

1. Paragraph 73 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that;  
  
‘Planning policies should be based on robust and up to date assessments of the needs for sports and recreation facilities’.
2. An up to date PPS is therefore an important part of the evidence base for the Local Plan. NPPF goes on to state in paragraph 74 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’.
3. The PPS also performs a wider role in establishing a baseline of the condition and usage of the existing stock of facilities across Pendle. It is an essential piece of work to inform and support funding bids to Sport Governing Bodies for improvements to pitches and ancillary facilities. By identifying future growth trends it is also a useful indicator of how sports participation may develop and complements the Health & Well-being agenda.
4. The Council’s first Outdoor Recreation Strategy was developed in 2003 and lasted 5 years. In July 2008, a report was taken to Management Team detailing plans to develop a second generation strategy (10 year) to replace the original one. It was suggested that specialist consultants be commissioned to carry out the necessary research and consultation work needed to be able to draft the new Strategy. As this was costly at £20,000, Management Team decided against this option and instead opted for producing a revised extended Strategy for another 5 years (this took us up to 2013). As such, the Strategy ceased to exist in 2013 and due to a significant lack of resources (financial and staff) no work has been forthcoming on developing a new strategic plan for playing pitches and outdoor recreation.
5. In late 2013, Rossendale Council approached a number of East Lancashire Local Authorities about the possibility of commissioning a joint Pennine Lancashire Playing Pitch study in line with Sport England guidance in order to spread costs, make more efficient use of resources and to tackle cross boundary issues. As we were keen to pursue this avenue further, contact was made with the Principal Planning Officer (Policy) who agreed that this would be a viable option to explore as a PPS would be an important part of any Green Infrastructure Strategy (GIS).
6. Subsequently, the first steering group meeting took place on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013 where a plan was drafted for the development of a joint Pendle, Burnley and Rossendale PPS. It was agreed that we would follow Sport England guidance by involving National Governing Bodies (NGB’s) throughout the whole process.
7. Producing the end Strategy and associated Assessment Report has taken significantly longer than expected. This has been primarily due to the challenge of carrying out stages A and B (following Sport England’s Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance model) in-house via relevant

leads from each Local Authority, Sport England and NGB's. The completion of stages A and B included:

- Producing a project brief/vision
- Developing Timescales/Action Plan
- Establishing a Steering Group
- Quantitative and qualitative assessment of sports pitches
- Information gathering/research
- Consultation with relevant organisations, e.g. Sports Clubs, Schools, NGB's, etc.
- Collation of information

The main challenge for all three LA's has been obtaining the adequate data from local Sports Clubs. A minimum response rate of approximately 70% is required before Sport England and the NGB's will consider the data to be robust.

8. Although the first two stages of the process were done in-house, it was agreed early on by the steering group that we would need an experienced Sports management consultancy to carry out the analysis of the supply and demand information and views and to develop the strategy culminating in the production of a Strategy and Assessment Report. On the advice of Sport England, we appointed Knight Kavanagh & Page (KKP) to do this. Stages C and D have taken over a year to complete but we now have the completed documents at our disposal.

Sport England's stepped approach to developing a PPS:

- Stage A: Prepare and tailor the approach (Step 1)
- Stage B: Gather information and views on the supply of and demand for provision (Steps 2 & 3)
- Stage C: Assess the supply and demand information and views (Steps 4, 5 & 6)
- Stage D: Develop the strategy (Steps 7 & 8)
- Stage E: Deliver the strategy and keep it robust and up to date (Steps 9 & 10)

## **Key findings**

9. The whole 'Strategy & Action Plan' and 'Assessment Report' documents have not been provided to the Executive due to the size of them (these can be emailed to Members if you wish). Subsequently, an Executive Summary, detailing key findings and sport specific recommendations, has been drafted and is attached in Appendix 1.
10. The main headline is that there is an overall deficiency in pitch provision for junior and youth football (current and in the future), Cricket and Rugby Union. These shortages primarily derive from the inadequacies of the existing pitches (especially poor drainage and over play) that mean that the ability to play matches is heavily limited. There is also currently a shortage of two full size 3G (all-weather) pitches. It should be noted that with the new 3G pitch being built at Fisher More High School, in reality we will have a shortage of only one 3G pitch come October 2016.

NB. Burnley FC in the Community are proposing to build an external 3G pitch as part of the Northlight project at Brierfield Mill, this will only be a 7 v 7 pitch (60m x 40m). There is also an intention to have an indoor 3G 5 v 5 pitch (37m x 27m).

Although these will be welcome additions in terms of 3G pitch provision to the local area and will be available to hire to local clubs as well as usage allocated to Burnley FC's own

community programme needs, there will still be a deficiency of approximately 0.5 (which equates to another external 7 v 7 3G pitch).

11. Where a deficiency in pitches is identified it is Sport England policy to resist the loss of any pitches, including those that are currently lapsed or disused. This means that where a site is not used and could be sold off to developers, e.g. Harrison Drive, Sport England would normally object to any proposal for its loss unless the Council and/or developer provided suitable replacement provision, such as upgrading another playing field site in the vicinity. It would be up to the Council and/or developer to demonstrate to Sport England that any mitigation proposed would be appropriate.
12. The PPS is not a static document but is meant to be reviewed annually and action taken to address deficiencies, such as making grant applications to improve existing sites. By focussed improvement of a relatively small number of pitches in a range of key locations the existing deficiency could be addressed in the short term (2-4 years).
13. As an important provider of pitches in the borough, it is essential that the Council buy in to the recommendations and focus any resources on addressing areas of provision where there is currently a deficit.
14. In view of the Transfer of Services work that is currently ongoing with Town and Parish Councils particularly around playing fields/sports pitches and Parks, it is imperative that they are made aware of the importance of the PPS and its recommendations. The Council should encourage the Town and Parish Councils to sign up to, and adopt, the Strategy and the ethos behind it in the long term. As such, if sites are transferred to them from PBC in the next 2-3 years, it would be important to put this as a condition in the transfer legal paperwork.

## **Conclusion**

15. The PPS is an important document which identifies the quantity and quality of the borough's stock of playing pitches with the contents being an important part of the evidence base for phase 2 of the Local Plan and informing the preparation of the GIS. Because of its sign off by the Sport Governing Bodies and Sport England it does create better opportunities to bid for additional funding.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

**Policy:** The PPS will contribute to the Council's strategic objectives, specifically:

- Objective 1 – Working with partners and the community to sustain services of good value and;
- Objective 3 – Ensuring a clean, healthier, safer and cohesive Pendle.

The PPS will be an important part of the evidence base for the Local Plan and the information contained within it will help inform the GIS.

It will also contribute to, and have a positive impact on, the Council's Health & Well-being agenda.

**Financial:** The strategy will have implications for ongoing investment in playing pitches across the borough.

Many of the playing pitches in the borough are Council owned. Given the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and challenges faced in terms of savings to be made in the next 3 years in addition to the fact that there is no capital programme and limited ongoing revenue budgets for

maintenance and ancillary facility R&M, external funding, careful management of annual budgets and the opportunity costs associated with disused or surplus pitches should be carefully considered by Members.

**Legal:** None

**Risk Management:** There is a danger that the PPS is seen as an end in itself, rather than a living document and a basis for identifying where change is needed.

It will be important to ensure Town and Parish Councils are on board with the PPS and its subsequent recommendations/ethos as sites could be transferred to them in the short term. If they are not willing to adopt the basic principles of the PPS then playing pitches and outdoor recreation in general could suffer in the long term.

**Health and Safety:** None

**Sustainability:** The PPS will provide a strategic way forward over the next 10 years in terms of playing pitch development and improvement.

**Community Safety:** None

**Equality and Diversity:** None

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Executive Summary

## **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None