
Report to:	Cabinet	Date of Meeting:	4 February 2016
Subject:	Playing Pitch Strategy for Sefton	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Report of:	Chief Executive		
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes	Is it included in the Forward Plan?	Yes
Exempt/Confidential	No		

Summary

A Playing Pitch Strategy has been prepared to support the emerging Local Plan and is essential evidence for the current Local Plan public hearings. The assessment underlying the strategy has found there is a shortage of playing fields for some of the key pitch sports (football, rugby & cricket).

The strategy outlines a number of ways of addressing this shortage, including better maintenance of existing pitches, greater community use of school playing fields, and the development of 'hub' sites.

Recommendation

That Cabinet approves the draft Playing Pitch Strategy for consultation.

Reasons for the Recommendation:

In order to seek the views of the communities of Sefton on the content of the draft Strategy.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Not to consult.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs £1,500 to cover consultation costs from existing revenue budgets. Any further financial implications would need to be reported when the details of any chosen strategy were being considered

(B) Capital Costs None. However, the strategy, if adopted, would significantly enhance the prospects of attracting external funding.

Implications of the Proposals:

The following implications of the proposals set out in the report have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Risk, Staffing and Assets): No specific implications at this stage.
Legal Implications: No implications
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Chief Finance Officer (FD 3983/16) has been consulted and notes that existing budget provision can cover the costs associated with the proposed consultation.

The Head of Regulation and Compliance (LD 3266/16) has been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

The Strategy has been co-ordinated by a working group comprising representatives from Sefton Sports Council, representatives from National Governing Bodies of the main pitch sports. Sports leagues and clubs have contributed to the study which underpins this Strategy.

Implementation Date for the Decision

Following the expiry of the “call-in” period for the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting

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Background Papers:

The following background papers, which are not available elsewhere on the Internet, can be accessed on the Council website:

- Draft Playing Pitch Strategy for Sefton, December 2015
- Draft Action Plan prepared for the Inspector into the Sefton Local Plan, 17th December 2015

1. Introduction & Context

- 1.1 The Playing Pitch Strategy was commissioned in January 2015 to provide important evidence to support the draft Local Plan which is currently being examined by an independent Inspector.
- 1.2 “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” (para 73 of the National Planning Policy Framework).
- 1.3 The Inspector required the draft Strategy to be publicly available to those participating in the examination hearings in order for members of the public to have a chance to comment on it before discussion of the relevant policy and sites proposed for development in the Local Plan.
- 1.4 The Strategy has not been formally approved by the Council and is still in draft form.

2. Preparation of the Playing Pitch Strategy

- 2.1 Sport England provide a methodology for preparing a strategy of this kind and the final strategy must be ‘signed off’ by both them and the National Governing Bodies (NGBs) for the main pitch sports if the strategy is going to carry weight at a Local Plan examination or be able to attract funding.
- 2.2 The strategy has been developed by a working group comprising a broad range of interests. This includes relevant departments from the Council (Parks & Greenspace, Sports Development, Planning, Schools, Property Management), Sefton Sports Council and representatives from the NGBs for football, rugby, cricket & hockey. The strategy also includes an assessment of bowls and tennis.
- 2.3 The strategy is based on an assessment of the quantity and quality of pitches (and greens & courts) and an analysis of demand. This includes unmet, displaced and future demand (for example, if pitches and facilities were improved, would more people wish to take part in these sports? Also, based on current trends, what is the likely future demand for pitches?).

3. Key findings of the study

- 3.1 This section outlines the main findings from the assessment of supply and demand for facilities for the main pitch sports.
- 3.2 There are shortfalls in both the quality and quantity of grass football pitches across Sefton. This is likely to be further exacerbated in the future if displaced teams to neighbouring authorities such as Liverpool and West Lancashire (where there is no existing charges to hire local authority youth pitches) were to travel back into Sefton in the likely event that pitch charges are introduced in those authorities.

- 3.3 There is a significant shortfall of 3G football pitches (the latest type of artificial pitch) in Sefton as there are currently none. There is a recommended need for at least 11 full size 3G pitches using the FA model to service current demand for training.
- 3.4 When taking into account unmet, displaced and future demand there is an overall shortfall of 2.5 grass wicket cricket pitches in Sefton. This is primarily a result of overplay in Formby and Maghull & Sefton East which cannot be addressed through using spare capacity in other areas.
- 3.5 Overall in Sefton there is a current shortfall of grass rugby union pitches which is further exacerbated when accounting for future demand. The shortfall expressed is mostly as a result of overplay at Waterloo Recreation Ground, Southport (Southport RUFC), Litherland Sports Park (Waterloo RUFC) and Waterloo RUFC, Crosby, coupled with unmet demand. There are also no 3G AGPs in Sefton that comply with the relevant World Rugby Regulation
- 3.6 There is sufficient availability of sand based Artificial Grass Pitches for hockey within Sefton to accommodate current and future demand for both competitive hockey play and organised training. However, there is an identified need to increase the quality of existing provision and in particular Greenbank High School, Birkdale, which is assessed as poor quality.
- 3.7 There are a sufficient number of tennis courts that are available for community use to accommodate current demand in Sefton. However, there is a shortfall in the quality of some courts and some isolated areas where additional courts may be required to meet future demand e.g. Blundellsands Lawn Tennis Club. In terms of quantity, the provision of bowling greens in Sefton is sufficient to accommodate both current and future demand. However, there are shortfalls in the quality of existing provision.

4. Way forward

- 4.1 There are major opportunities to address the deficiencies identified e.g. improving the maintenance of pitches, more community use of school sites and in particular the creation of football 'hub' sites and provision of 3G (artificial) pitches to serve both current and future demand.
- 4.2 The success of this Strategy and the benefits that are gained are dependent upon regular engagement between all partners involved and the adoption of a strategic approach.
- 4.3 The Strategy suggests the Council identify a lead officer to take the recommendations forward. One of the Council's Executive Directors is setting up a steering group which will include a range of external partners to make sure the Strategy is implemented.
- 4.4 Even though the Strategy is still in draft form, it has been critical to make progress in working on the Strategy given the potential implications of its findings in relation to the housing sites proposed in the draft Local Plan. The Inspector asked all parties who wished to comment on individual sites or the relevant policy in the Local Plan about protecting playing fields to provide comments to him by 18th December. The

Council provided a draft action plan to indicate it is already geared to implementing the strategy (listed as a background paper).

4.5 The draft Playing Pitch Strategy needs to be consulted on widely to build up a broad base of interest and find further partners to turn the recommendations into reality. A report will be taken to the next meeting of the Consultation & Engagement Panel on 29th January so that they may agree the approach to consultation. It is intended the consultation will begin later in February and run for eight weeks.

4.6 There are a number of benefits to Sefton of getting support for taking this Strategy forward:

- It provides an opportunity to review the Council's priorities for maintaining, improving and rationalising its playing pitch stock
- The Strategy means that the Council and its partners are eligible for external funding for investment in playing fields and associated facilities given there is now an up-to-date strategy
- There will be an opportunity to attract more young people into sports based on improved facilities
- There is the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of the residents of Sefton.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 There is widespread support for taking this draft Strategy forward from partner organisations including Sport England, the local representatives from the national governing bodies and from local leagues and clubs.

5.2 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the draft Playing Pitch Strategy for consultation to seek the views of local communities in Sefton.