

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET - 29th March 2012

TELFORD & WREKIN PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY 2012

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND LEISURE SERVICES

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

- 1.1 National planning policies and agencies such as Sport England recommend all Local Authorities have a Playing Pitch Strategy to inform planning policy and provide recommendations for the future protection and development of pitches.
- 1.2 A new and revised Playing Pitch Strategy for the borough has been developed which updates data and recommendations from the previous strategy completed in 2003. The strategy analyses current and future demand for grass and artificial pitches for five key sports: football, rugby union, rugby league, cricket and hockey. It also identifies supply and demand for bowls greens as a key participatory and priority sport in the borough and in keeping with recommendations from Sport England.
- 1.3 This report summaries the key findings, strategic recommendations and actions for each key sport. In addition, it seeks Cabinet agreement to proceed with specific recommendations which are the protection of Stirchley Recreation Ground Playing Pitches under the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge and policy adoption in terms of 'community club managed' football sites.
- 1.4 Once formally adopted by the Council, these strategy documents will be recognised by funding bodies such as Sport England and will provide the evidence base for Telford & Wrekin Council and its partners to access future external funding and to guide future decision making, particularly in respect of the impact and opportunities arising from the physical development of the borough. This includes the Protecting Playing Fields fund, which has been recently launched by Sport England and provides capital investment to create, develop and improve playing fields for long-term sporting and community use.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That Members endorse and formally adopt the findings and recommendations of the Playing Pitch Strategy 2012 for Telford & Wrekin which includes maximising community use of BSF sites, primary schools and other educational establishments.**
- 2.2 **That Members agree to undertake a review of the current arrangements for community club managed football sites in line with Cooperative Council priorities and as outlined in this report.**
- 2.3 **That Members agree to nominate Stirchley Recreation Ground Pitches (Appendice 1 and 2) as the second Council site to be put forward under the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge for protection in perpetuity.**
- 2.4 **Grant delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Environmental and Leisure Services following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Well-Being to progress the other individual recommendations and actions identified within the strategies, seeking future Cabinet authority on individual projects as appropriate.**

SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	<i>Improved lives for all Residents feeling safe and proud of where they live Cooperative Council working more closely with the community.</i>
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	<i>The strategy provides guidelines and actions which will provide enhanced community and sporting provision for a range of community groups including people of all ages, different genders, those with a disability and affected by deprivation. The resulting projects will also impact positively on people's health.</i>
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE	<i>Formal adoption of the Strategy is required by April 2012. Actions to be progressed as a result of the Strategy will be delivered from April 2012 onwards. Several identified projects link into the BSF programme, for which a timeframe is currently being finalised.</i>	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	<i>There are no direct financial implications as a result of adopting the Playing Pitch Strategy. There may be additional pitch maintenance costs arising from future implementation of the strategy, which will be monitored and reported as appropriate. JAC090312</i>
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	<i>The designation of land under the Fields in Trust scheme will place restrictions on the land including a prohibition on sale without consent of FIT and provision of replacement land. The legal implications arising from other proposals will be addressed within future reports to Cabinet.</i>
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	<i>The report highlights future options for investment and rationalisation in playing field provision across Telford & Wrekin. It identifies ways to support the sustainability and where appropriate increase participation of a range of sports. The recommendations contained in this report will support the development of physically active, healthy, prosperous and safe communities. As individual proposals are brought forward, they will be subject to detailed risk appraisals and supported by bespoke consultations.</i>
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	<i>The strategy and recommendations will have a positive impact on the borough as a whole.</i>

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. INFORMATION

Background

- 3.1 Telford & Wrekin Council owns approximately 65 football pitches across the borough, which equates to about 60% of all community accessible pitches. The pitch maintenance programme is currently provided by the Council via the TWS contract and consists of grass cutting, pitch marking, putting up/ taking down the goals, end of season renovation and additional maintenance works depending on weather and budget. This costs the Council on average £101,515 per year.

It should be noted that the above figures do not include building costs (cleaning, R&M, utility etc) or administration costs relating to bookings and invoicing.

- 3.2 With regards to income, the Council generates approximately £38,317 per annum from pitch hire. This is based on prices ranging from £54.85 for a senior pitch with changing to £16.70 for a junior pitch only.
- 3.3 A Playing Pitch Strategy for the borough was developed and formally adopted by the Council in 2003. A full and comprehensive review of current playing pitch provision across the borough has since been undertaken and has informed the development of the 2012 Playing Pitch Strategy (available as a hard copy in the Members Room and online).

This report analyses current and future demand for grass and artificial pitches for five key sports: football, rugby union, rugby league, cricket and hockey. It also identifies supply and demand for bowls greens as a key participatory and priority sport in the borough and in keeping with recommendations from Sport England.

The strategy sits alongside the West Midlands Sports Facility and the Telford & Wrekin Leisure Facilities Framework, the latter which was completed in 2007.

As well as guiding potential future investment into Telford & Wrekin Council facility provision, the strategy is an important tool for other organisations (e.g. sports clubs and National Governing Bodies of Sport) in developing their own specific facility plans. It may also support planning applications and decisions, particularly those affecting the future provision of public open space. Sport England is a statutory consultee on planning applications involving playing fields and has been a key partner throughout the development of this strategy. The strategy has also been consulted on with appropriate local sports clubs and National Governing Bodies of Sport.

- 3.4 The landscape for the management and development of sports facilities has changed since the previous Playing Pitch Strategy was commissioned. This includes public sector funding cuts affecting the scope of the Council's capital programme and subsequent limited investment to support future facility and playing pitch improvements. In addition, there have been developments to the Council's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme which presents opportunities to secure greater community use of school sites.

All of the above will inevitably have an effect on the Council's ability to invest in improved sports and leisure facilities. Nevertheless, the background information which has guided the recommendations within the strategy continues to provide robust evidence for future need and investment.

3.5 The strategy has been 'future proofed' in line with the Core Development Strategy for Telford & Wrekin. It considers the major drivers for change, for example population demographics, new capital/ residential developments, the age and quality of existing facilities and playing fields, and public participation targets. In identifying future facility and playing field needs, reference has also been made to the national focus on improving physical activity, future 'demand pressures', opportunities for future funding including developer contributions, and the protection of facilities against future development pressures.

Telford & Wrekin Playing Pitch Strategy 2012

3.6 The aim of the Playing Pitch Strategy is to provide a strategic approach to future playing pitch provision. The strategy recognises that playing pitches are owned and maintained by a range of organisations and aims to support each of these and to encourage partnership working in order to provide appropriate high level provision. The study encompasses an assessment of all formal outdoor playing pitches facilities (football, cricket, rugby union, rugby league and hockey) and also includes analysis of bowls provision as recommended by Sport England.

3.7 Benefits of the strategy include:

- Protect facilities against development pressures, and/ or make improvements to existing provision where loss of facilities is agreed;
- Identify appropriate levels and types of pitch facilities to best meet any predicted population growth and changes in demand levels;
- Provide sufficient information to inform planning decisions and associated requests for section 106 or other planning gain for sites where there are applications for change of use pending;
- Provide a framework identifying priorities for investment and prioritisation of support for funding applications; this includes both playing pitches and changing accommodation; Address any 'demand' pressures created as a result of specific sports development pressures, in addition to addressing any issues related to provision 'surplus';
- Identify where a consistent approach to management, maintenance and charging needs to be implemented in the future.

3.8 Key audit findings are as follows:

- There is a total of 203 playing pitch sites currently in use across the sports assessed (179 football pitches, 11 rugby pitches, 11 cricket grounds, 2 hockey pitches) plus 10 artificial grass pitches and 25 crown and flat bowls greens.
- Not all pitches are currently available for community use under formal agreements.
- Ownership of pitches varies across the sports – 25% of bowls greens are owned by the Local Authority whereas by comparison approximately 60% of grass playing pitches with community access are in Council ownership.
- There are around 387 teams (290 football, 53 cricket, 33 rugby, 11 hockey) across the five main pitch sports assessed. The majority of these play regular fixtures in affiliated and unaffiliated leagues. Football, as in most areas of the country, accounts for most of this – 75% of all teams identified are football teams playing regular games.
- There are 18 crown green bowls clubs in the borough and only 1 flat green bowls club.

3.9 The main supply and demand analysis for each of the sports (football, rugby union, rugby league, cricket, hockey and bowls) are as follows:

- **Football Borough-Wide** – there is currently an over-supply of all pitches within the Telford & Wrekin area, but this turns into an under provision in junior and mini pitches when only pitches with community use are taken into consideration. The lack of junior pitch provision is the biggest issue across the borough. This demand will only increase in future years with the introduction of new regulations from the FA with regards to 9v9 football. Pitch quality is an issue across the borough resulting in a loss of pitch capacity and frequent match cancellations.
- **Football by Cluster Area** – there is adequate pitch provision across all age groups if total number of pitches (including those without existing community access) are considered. A review of only those pitches that have community use indicates a disproportionate spread with the North area having the highest provision and Wellington the least. The central and south areas have a balance in senior and junior pitch provision, but a lack of mini pitches. Newport has adequate supply of senior pitches with community use, but an under provision of junior pitches and a small deficit of mini pitches by 2021.
- **Rugby Union** - there is currently adequate provision of pitches across the two RFU clubs, however this is not enough to compensate for loss of provision/ match cancellation due to issues with pitch quality and drainage. Ancillary provision (i.e. changing) is inadequate at both clubs.
- **Rugby League** – there is currently an under provision of both adult and junior pitches in as no security or permanent pitches exist. Dawley CLC will address this a small over-supply of adult and junior pitches is projected by 2021, however modelling does not take into consideration the increase in the number of teams as a result of targets agreed through the Dawley CLC development which is due to open at the end of 2013.
- **Cricket** - current cricket provision is only just sufficient to meet demand, although the distribution of pitches is poor and clubs are reaching their capacity. A further ground will be required by 2016 if the rates of participation grow at 1% pa. This assessment is supported by the Shropshire Cricket Board facilities strategy. The priority areas for facility develop are Telford Central, followed by Telford North and then South.
- **Hockey** - there is currently a small under provision of approximately 1 senior pitch. The club require a site with two artificial hockey pitches in order to grow. Other issues include lack of security of tenure and income generating opportunities.
- **Crown Bowls** – there is an adequate level of crown greens across the borough which has the second highest per capita rates of provision of the comparator areas. There is a concentration of greens in the North cluster area with a comparative lack of provision in the Central and South areas. Although the quality of the greens themselves is relatively good, the ancillary provision across the borough does not meet demand or national standards and requires further investment.
- **Flat Green Bowls** – there is a low per capita rate of provision with the only green located in the North cluster area. However, with only 25 full time members, the club has adequate capacity to accommodate an increase in demand due to population growth and a rise in participation figures. Although the quality of the green itself is relatively good, there are no floodlights and ancillary provision does not meet demand or national standards and requires further investment.

- **Indoor Bowls** - Telford & Wrekin does not meet the Governing Bodies recommended per capita rates of provision, however this is currently being met by neighbouring local authorities. There is not considered to be a clear identified need for a specialist indoor bowls facility in Telford & Wrekin given that Shrewsbury has developed a six-rink facility within the last five years. Opportunities to develop indoor bowls at existing sites, through the use of short mat bowls, should be encouraged.

3.10 Key recommendations of the strategy are:

- Deficiencies in pitch supply across the Borough to be addressed through negotiation of formal community use agreements on education sites where no such agreement currently exists (this reflects proposed Sport England and DCMS strategy), pitch improvement works and reconfiguration of existing sites.
- The long term usefulness of some sites in providing for community sport should be reviewed. In some cases it is recommended that single pitch sites may be given over to alternative uses, thereby providing the opportunity to prioritise investment and create better quality multi-pitch sites with an emphasis on junior and mini pitches.
- Agree and adopt a corporate policy for community club managed football sites in line with Cooperative Council Policy.
- Recognise the essential role that the BSF programme plays in the sustainability and development of pitch provision and the importance of formalising community use agreements to inform the design and development of future sites.
- Adopt the principle that all existing playing field space should be retained and/ or where practical, replaced preferably with improved quality.
- Where playing fields are agreed by the Council to be lost to development, these should be replaced in a manner which meets the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17.
- Adopt a clear set of planning criteria and standards of provision for the future development of pitches.
- Adopt a standard policy and appropriate charge for on-site and off-site developer contributions towards sports and leisure provision (tariff approach to be considered)
- Review and standardise charging policy for all grass and artificial pitches.
- Priorities for future investment into pitches should be for changing provision, pitch quality improvement works
- Priorities for future investment into bowls greens should be for ancillary facilities at priority crown green clubs and the borough's only flat green club.
- Work with existing flat green bowls club to maximise capacity and improve security of tenure.

The priorities and actions for football, rugby union, rugby league, cricket, hockey and bowls are included with the Strategy which is appended to this report.

4. **IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The Playing Pitch Strategy 2012 includes two specific recommendations which require Cabinet agreement and are outlined below for further consideration:

4.1 ***Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge***

The Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge organised by Fields in Trust (FIT) aims to safeguard nationally at least 2,012 outdoor recreational spaces for future generations in celebration of the Diamond Jubilee, linking also in with the London 2012 Olympics. The Fields in Trust (FIT)

are asking Local Authorities to nominate public open spaces they would like to see protected in perpetuity.

The Playing Pitch Strategy includes reference to the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge which is a national initiative looking to safeguard open space and pitches for sport, play and recreation and provide a focus for celebrations of landmark events in 2012 (Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games).

Telford & Wrekin Council agreed to participate in this initiative on 22nd March 2011 and nominated the Telford Town Park Arena as the first open space within the Borough to become a Queen Elizabeth II Field designated area under this programme.

Stirchley Recreation Ground Playing Pitches has been nominated by the Fields in Trust and Football Association and the Council has been asked to consider this site under the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge. See Appendix 1 for a plan of this site.

The proposed designation is considered to be complementary to the current BSF proposals for the site and potentially affords additional external funding opportunities.

4.2 Community Club Managed Football Sites

Although the majority of playing field sites used by the community are managed by the authority, Telford and Wrekin currently operates three 'community club' agreements with local football clubs at the following sites:

- Regatta Fields, Ironbridge - the agreement at the Regatta Fields is made with the trustees of Madeley Football Club. It is a Tenancy Agreement with an annual rent payable by the club.
- The Elms Playing Fields, Stirchley - the agreement at The Elms Playing Fields is made with the trustees of the All Saints Boys Guild Football Club. It is a Lease Agreement the club required to pay an annual peppercorn rent.
- Shukers Playing Fields, Newport - the agreement at Shukers Playing Fields is made with the trustees of Nova United Junior Football Club. It is a Tenancy Agreement with an annual rent payable by the club.

The schedule of responsibilities for the clubs within the agreements is broadly similar and relates to grounds maintenance programme, cleaning and general upkeep of the built facilities, hedges and fences.

The following general issues relating to the 'community club managed' sites have emerged from consultation with both the clubs and the authority:

- The agreements are 'rolled on' annually and have not been formally reviewed or updated since their inception;
- The Council do not have a clear policy relating to 'community club managed' sites, and are therefore unable to respond clearly to enquiries in relation to opportunities for other clubs to have such agreements;
- Lack of security prevents the clubs obtaining external funding/grants e.g. from the Football Foundation;
- Additional bookings and other uses (e.g. tourism events at Regatta Fields) outside of the football season occur which can cause damage to the pitches both directly e.g. vehicles driving/parking on the pitches, and indirectly by delaying and reducing the amount of post season pitch renovation that can be undertaken;

- There are concerns regarding both the amount and nature of the grounds maintenance work currently undertaken;
- The pitches are at risk of over-use caused by both the number of teams playing/training on them, and sub-letting to other clubs;
- There are concerns about the security of grounds maintenance equipment owned by the clubs which is stored on-site;
- There are no community use targets within the agreements.

The above issues around the current 'community club managed' agreements operated by Telford and Wrekin present an opportunity to be addressed. The Council should adopt a policy to improve and promote community club managed sites in line with Cooperative Council policies.

It is recommended the Council undertakes a complete review of the current arrangements and redesign the agreements to better reflect the needs of both the clubs and the local authority (and also to satisfy national governing body requirements for successful grant applications). This should include suitability of site, rental amounts, defined roles and responsibilities, community use targets and regular reviews. The policy needs to consider future requests/sites and include criteria in terms of the type and capacity of clubs to ensure long-term sustainability of both the facility and the club itself.

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

Cabinet 22 March 2011 – Telford Town Park Arena Queen Elizabeth II Fields.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Stirchley Recreation Ground Pitches Plan
Appendix 2 – Stirchley Recreation Ground Pitches Ariel Plan

Telford & Wrekin Playing Pitch Strategy 2012 is available as a hard copy in the Members Room and online.

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