

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	16 September 2015
Subject:	Draft Gloucester Playing Pitch Strategy		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	Yes	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	1. Final Draft Gloucester Playing Pitch Strategy 2015 – 2025 2. Artificial Grass Pitch – Scenario Paper 3. Playing Pitch Strategy Assessment Report 4. Consultation Summary & Key Questions		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with a summary of the outputs of the final draft Playing Pitch Strategy and seek authorisation to publish it for a six-week period of public consultation, before consideration by Council for adoption.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that the final draft Playing Pitch Strategy, as provided at Appendix 1, and the Artificial Grass Pitch – Scenario Paper, as provided at Appendix 2, be approved for the purposes of public consultation.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The availability of a sufficient number and quality of playing pitches to provide for the community's current and future sports needs is important in terms of encouraging participation in sport and physical activity, and for general health and wellbeing.
- 3.2 National Planning Policy requires local authorities to carry out an assessment of the needs for sports and recreational facilities as well as opportunities for new provision. Furthermore, the preparation and adoption of a Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) forms a key deliverable in the Council Plan 2014 – 2017.
- 3.3 With this in mind, Officers appointed consultants Knight Kavanagh and Page (KKP) in September 2014 to prepare a PPS for the City, covering 2015 - 2025. The key outputs of the PPS are as follows:
- To inform the emerging planning policy (Joint Core Strategy and Gloucester City Plan);
 - To inform the Council's future sports and health strategies and investment plans;

- Ensure the most efficient management and maintenance of sports facility provision in response to identified pressures;
- To provide adequate planning guidance to assess development proposals affecting sport and leisure facilities;
- To inform land use decisions in respect of future use of existing sport and leisure facilities; and
- Provide the basis for ongoing monitoring and review of the use, distribution, function, quality, and accessibility of outdoor sport, physical activity facility provision, and playing pitches.

3.4 The draft PPS covers the following outdoor sports pitches and ancillary facilities; football; cricket; rugby union; rugby league; bowls; and tennis courts. It also considers Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) which can be used by several sports.

3.5 It primarily covers the administrative areas of Gloucester City. It does however also consider communities living on the edge of the City in the wider 'travel to play' area, acknowledging that the catchments for sports pitches will in some cases go beyond administrative boundaries.

3.6 To ensure robust and credible outcomes, the draft PPS has been prepared in accordance with Sport England's 'Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance' and led by a steering group which includes officers, representatives from the relevant National Governing Bodies, Sport England, Active Gloucestershire and Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust.

3.7 It has been prepared over a period of 12 months, so as to align with the affiliation processes and playing season for the different sports. It has been informed by a significant amount of information from sports clubs, key stakeholders and schools. For example, questionnaires were sent to all sports clubs and face-to-face interviews were held with some of the larger clubs. This was undertaken to gather views / information on the quality of pitches clubs play on, their security of tenure, the numbers of teams / players and future club development plans.

3.8 Interviews were also held with key stakeholders in the provision of sports facilities or generators of demand, such as secondary schools, the University of Gloucestershire, Hartpury College and Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust.

3.9 On-site quality assessments were undertaken on all pitches, both public and private, in accordance with sport-specific criteria set out in Sport England's guidance.

4.0 Summary of outcomes by sport

4.1 The information gathered, together with an understanding of factors that will affect participation in the different sports, such as population growth, participation trends and funding priorities of the NGBs, were analysed to provide an assessment of the adequacy of provision for current and future communities.

4.2 Below is a summary of the main outcomes and issues identified through the assessment process on a sport-by-sport basis. The full Assessment Report is provided at Appendix 3 for information.

Football

- There are 92 grass football pitches, of which 79 are known to be available at some level for community use. A total of 166 football teams were identified as playing on pitches in Gloucester City.
- 56% of football pitches available for community use were assessed as being poor quality, 29% as standard quality and 15% as good. Some sites are subject to overplay.

- 53% of changing facilities were described by clubs as good, 37% as standard and 10% as poor. Particular concerns expressed regarding the size and number of changing facilities at Oxstalls Sports Park.
- Limited issues of clubs from Gloucester not being able to play in the City.
- Clubs report a lack of access to affordable floodlit training facilities and Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs), particularly those built to a '3G' standard.
- There is a current shortfall of match sessions at some football formats but increases in future demand would cause a shortfall across all formats.

'3G' standard pitches

- There are currently no 3G pitches in the City.
- The FA model suggests there is a current shortfall of three full-size 3G pitches to meet demand for football training.
- There is a growing demand for all age groups to play on 3G pitches, particularly at youth level but in Gloucester also at adult level as this is where there is a greatest shortfall of grass pitches.
- The draft PPS recommends that a 3G pitch 'sub-strategy', setting out how 3G pitches could be delivered in the City. This has been prepared by officers, working with the relevant NGBs, and is provided as Appendix 2. Further information is provided at Section 6 of this report.

Cricket

- There are 14 grass cricket squares in Gloucester, all of which are available for community use. There are six artificial wickets; five located at schools sites and one at Bishops College - but which is not suitable for use.
- Three cricket squares found to be good quality, ten standard quality and one poor quality. Generally the condition of squares is adequate but outfielders tend to be poor.
- Demand is falling for cricket, reflected by a reduction in the number of cricket pitches over time. However this would likely increase with improvements to pitch quality.
- In contrast to the picture nationally, cricket clubs in Gloucester tend to lack security of tenure and are therefore quite 'nomadic'. This can affect longterm development plans for clubs and therefore participation.
- Overall there is sufficient capacity within Gloucester to accommodate current and future demand on existing squares – but there is a lack of access to high quality playing and ancillary facilities.

Rugby Union

- There are 48 senior rugby pitches located across 23 sites, of which 39 are available for community use. There are also 5 mini pitches. Most pitches are located at school or sports club sites.
- There are 31 senior teams – of which just one ladies team at Hucclecote RFC, as well as 25 junior boys teams and 36 mini teams.
- There are four standard quality pitches at Archdeacon Meadow, otherwise all other pitches in the City were assessed as poor.
- There are significant issues relating to overplay on pitches, generally due to excessive training, sustained weekly junior use and limited capacity on poor quality pitches.
- There are currently no 'World Rugby' standard AGPs in the City.
- Overall there are insufficient pitches in Gloucester to provide for current and future demand.

Hockey

- There are four AGPs suitable for competitive hockey play – though only three are available for use by hockey clubs. All four were assessed as standard quality.

- There are three hockey clubs playing in the City of which Gloucester City Hockey Club is the largest and has plans to increase men's and junior's participation.
- Clubs identified a lack of changing facilities at Oxstalls Sports Park as an issue.
- Overall Gloucester is at present adequately provided for AGPs suitable for hockey but access to pitches for training is an issue and reported to be a limiting factor in the growth in participation. The lack of 3G pitches is a big factor in creating mid-week capacity issues as many hockey suitable AGPs are used for football and rugby union training. Hockey can only be played on sand-dressed AGPs.
- Concerns expressed over the implications for hockey as a result of the University of Gloucestershire's plans for expansion at their Oxstalls Campus and potential loss of AGPs.

Rugby league

- There are no pitches specifically marked for rugby league in the City – play currently takes place at Bishop's College on a flood-lit rugby union pitch.
- The University of Gloucestershire has two rugby league teams (with links to All Golds RLFC), but both play outside of the City. The other team is Gloucestershire Warriors RLFC, which plays in the City.
- There is likely to be increased participation in rugby league due to club expansion plans and rugby league initiatives.
- The draft PPS does not identify any specific need for specific rugby league pitches given cross-over with rugby union pitches.

Bowls

- There are seven grass bowling greens and one artificial green in Gloucester.
- There are eight clubs using bowling greens in the City with reports that membership has remained static in the last three years.
- All greens were assessed as good quality with the exception on one at Tuffley Park which was assessed as standard quality. There is however evidence of overplay at two greens.
- Overall, the City is generally well-served for bowling greens at present and in the future.

Tennis

- There are a total of 75 tennis courts in the City across 17 sites (both tennis clubs and parks). There are nine courts on Council managed sites. An additional 278 courts are unavailable for community use, most of which are located at schools and unavailable because of a lack of flood lighting.
- 16% of courts were assessed as good quality, 36% average and 48% poor.
- Oxstalls Sports Park is the key venue for tennis development in the City.
- Overall, there are enough tennis courts in Gloucester to cater for current and future demand and casual use, though there is insufficient access to good quality flood lit courts required for the development of tennis at some clubs.

5.0 Vision, Strategy Recommendations and Action Plan

5.1 Using the research and analysis summarised above, a draft PPS has been developed which provides:

- A vision for the future improvement and prioritisation of playing pitches;
- A series of sport by sport recommendations which provide a strategic framework for sport-led improvements to provision;
- A series of strategic recommendations which provide a strategic framework for the improvement, maintenance, development and, as appropriate, rationalisation of the playing pitch stock; and
- A prioritised area-by-area action plan to address key issues.

5.2 The Vision for the Gloucester PPS is:

'To provide an accessible, high quality and sustainable network of outdoor sports facilities, which provide opportunities for all residents to access good sport, physical activity and recreational facilities.'

5.3 Following on from this, the draft PPS provides a range of sport-specific recommendations to address the key issues identified through the earlier stages of the process. As an example, this includes for rugby union the need to work with clubs to review pitch quality issues on those pitches assessed as 'standard quality' or 'poor quality' in order to help reduce overplay. The full schedule of sport-specific recommendations can be found at Part 3 of the draft PPS.

5.4 The draft strategy then sets out three overarching Aims and, sitting underneath this, a series of Strategic Recommendations. These are summarised below for information. Full detail is available at Part 4 of the draft PPS.

AIM 1 – To protect the existing supply of sports pitches for meeting current and future needs.

To achieve this aim, it makes the following Strategic Recommendations:

- (a) Protect sports facilities through local planning policy.
- (b) Secure tenure and access to sites for high quality, development minded clubs, through a range of solutions and partnership agreements.
- (c) Maximise community use of outdoor sports facilities where there is a need to do so.

AIM 2 – To enhance outdoor sports facilities through improving quality and management of sites.

To achieve this aim, it makes the following Strategic Recommendations:

- (d) Improve quality.
- (e) Adopt a tiered approach (hierarchy of provision) for the management and improvement of sites.
- (f) Work in partnership with stakeholders to secure funding.

AIM 3 – To provide new outdoor sports facilities where there is current or future demand to do so.

To achieve this aim, it makes the following Strategic Recommendations:

- (g) Secure planning gain for playing pitches from housing growth.
- (h) Rectify quantitative shortfalls in the current pitch stock.
- (i) Identify opportunities to add to the overall stock to accommodate both current and future demand.

5.5 Finally, the Action Plan sets out a range of different recommended actions / aims for all playing pitch sites in the City, within a defined hierarchy and level of priority, associated delivery partners, indicative timescales and costs. The full Action Plan is provided at Part 5 of the draft PPS.

5.6 In terms of delivery, the draft PPS is clear that the delivery of the Vision, Aims, Strategic Recommendations and Action Plan will require the continuation and expansion of key partnerships between the City Council, NGBs, Sport England, schools, further / higher education providers, community clubs and private landowners to maintain, enhance and deliver playing pitches. Delivery of the PPS is the responsibility of and relies on, all stakeholders.

- 5.7 Please note that since the draft PPS and Assessment Report were provided to the City Council, the circumstance with regard to Innsworth Lane Sports Ground has changed. At the time the documents were prepared, the site was disused following flooding. Since then, it has been restored and football play has recently resumed. The documentation will be amended accordingly post-consultation.

6.0 Artificial Grass Pitches – Scenario Paper

- 6.1 The 'Assessment Report' and draft PPS show that the delivery of a suitable number and type of Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) will be critical in delivering the Vision and recommends that a 'sub-strategy' is prepared, showing how these could be delivered in the City.
- 6.2 It is important there is a sub-strategy in place to ensure adequate provision is made for each of the different sports. There is capacity in the City for three 3G standard AGPs, with one constructed to 'World Rugby' standard, to enable football and rugby union play. At the same time, it is also important that other forms of AGP (sand-dressed and sand-based) are maintained in the City for hockey purposes (3G standard pitches cannot be used for competitive hockey).
- 6.3 In response, the City Council has worked with the Football Association, Rugby Football Union and England Hockey to begin this process by preparing a 'Scenario Paper'. It sets out three different scenarios, having regard to proposals that are currently emerging that would affect the number of AGPs in the City.
- 6.4 The 'Artificial Grass Pitch – Scenario Paper' is provided as Appendix 3 to this report and, subject to agreement from Cabinet, will be published alongside the draft PPS for public consultation.

7.0 Public Consultation

- 7.1 Officers have prepared a 'Consultation Summary and Key Questions' document, setting out the main aims and recommendations of the draft PPS and AGP Scenario Paper, along with key questions for the public consultation. This is provided at Appendix 4 for Members' information.

8.0 Asset Based Community Development Considerations

- 8.1 The draft PPS has been developed by Officers and the consultants in partnership with the National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and with input from the sports clubs, schools and key stakeholders for whom the strategy will ultimately effect.
- 8.2 The final part of the process is to publish the draft PPS for public consultation, amend as necessary and present to Council for adoption. After this, it will be necessary for all stakeholders, including sports clubs, to work collectively to deliver the PPS vision.

9.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 9.1 During the preparation of the PPS various different alternatives, or scenarios, to address the issues identified at the assessment stage of the process were considered, and the most suitable / deliverable strategy identified. The different scenarios considered are clearly presented in the draft PPS.

10.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 10.1 The PPS has now reached the final draft stage and the final part of the process is to consult on its findings and recommendations, before adoption by the Council.

11.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 11.1 Following the conclusion of public consultation, Officers will review consultation responses and, working with the PPS steering group, make amendments to the strategy as appropriate. Once this has been completed, the final PPS will be presented to Council for adoption early in the new year.

12.0 Financial Implications

- 12.1 Officers are seeking approval from Members to agree the draft PPS for the purposes of public consultation. The only financial implications at this stage are those relating to undertaking the consultation, which will be staff resources and absorbed within existing budgets.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report)

13.0 Legal Implications

- 13.1 The draft PPS will not in itself have a special legal status. However, it will form the body of evidence that may be taken into account when the draft development plan is to be considered and as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report)

14.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 14.1 A risk register has been completed and identified the main risks at this stage of the process as being a failure to adopt the PPS, a delay in the adoption of the PPS, or the adoption of an inappropriate PPS.
- 14.2 The draft PPS has been prepared over the past 12 months with involvement from key officers, National Governing Bodies (NGBs) sports clubs and other key stakeholders and in accordance with Sport England's 'Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance' and so represents a robust strategy based on sound evidence.
- 14.3 In terms of controls, public consultation represents the final part of the process and will ensure the PPS is fit for purpose and deliverable in advance of being presented to Council for adoption. A clear timetable has been put in place by the PPS steering group to take the strategy forward to adoption.

15.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 15.1 A PIA 'Screening' has been undertaken and shows that the draft PPS would not effect a particular group any differently to any other. A full PIA is not therefore required.

16.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

- 16.1 N/A

Sustainability

- 16.2 Once adopted, the Playing Pitch Strategy for Gloucester will have a positive effect on sustainability in Gloucester, providing a framework for protection, enhancement and provision of playing pitches in the City for the next five years. It will also set a good

foundation for the ongoing consideration of playing pitches through future updates to the Playing Pitch Strategy.

Staffing & Trade Union

16.3 Not applicable

Press Release drafted/approved

16.4 An approved press statement will be released should the draft strategy be approved for the purposes of public consultation.