

Community Committee	
Meeting Date	6 March 2024
Report Title	Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS)
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
Lead Officer	Jay Jenkins, Leisure & Technical Services Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This report recommends that the Committee adopt the Playing Pitch Strategy 2024 – 2038 as drafted in Appendix I. 2. That delegated authority is given to the Head of Environment & Leisure in consultation with the Chair of Community Committee to make minor amendments, should Sport England recommend any final changes

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council has developed a Playing Pitch Strategy for 2024 – 2038 (**Appendix I**) which analyses the Borough’s sports pitches in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility. It considers pitches that are available for public use provided by the Council and other organisations. The Strategy sets out the Council’s intended approach and priorities for ensuring there is sufficient provision to meet current and future demand.
- 1.2 This report seeks Committee approval for the new Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) for a period in line with the Local Plan. The Strategy provides an assessment of the current supply and demand of playing pitches within the Borough.
- 1.3 The Strategy was undertaken by independent consultants (Strategic Leisure) and uses the research, consultation, site assessments, data analysis and mapping that underpins the study to set direction and determine priorities for future provision.
- 1.4 The Strategy follows Sport England guidance and is supported by National Governing Bodies of Sport. This helps to provide robust evidence for supporting the Swale Local Plan process.
- 1.5 The document recognises the balance needed between setting priorities for action and the pressure on budgets in the public sector. It therefore identifies the need for a partnership approach with Sport England, National Governing Bodies of Sport, schools, local clubs, and private facility operators, to enable delivery of the action plan as resources allow.

- 1.6 The findings are based on a technical assessment which pulled together the baseline data that the recommendations are informed by. This included physical visits to sites, consultation with site owners, and consultation with users.

2 Background

- 2.1 The existing Swale PPS expired in 2023. The new strategy will cover the period in line with the Local Plan, 2024 - 2038.
- 2.2 In order to ensure there are sufficient pitches and ancillary facilities such as changing rooms and social facilities, the Council has worked with external consultants to analyse the currently available provision and develop a series of recommendations to ensure unmet and future demand can be met cost effectively.
- 2.3 Following the review process the document will inform the Borough's Local Plan (a requirement of the Local Plan process is to provide robust evidence base for decisions) and will help to ensure that appropriate contributions are made by developers, and suggested levels of provision are maintained.
- 2.4 Whilst the Council have undertaken this work, it recognises that we are not the sole provider of sports facilities, and so the Strategy suggests a partnership approach, making sure wider organisations understand the role they can play. Stakeholder meetings with the relevant operators and governing bodies will be held to help deliver the actions.
- 2.5 It was also important to note the tough budgetary position of public sector organisations. The document therefore regularly refers to the need to look at all options for investment, balancing out Swale BC expenditure with external income from grants and developer contributions.
- 2.6 The recommendations set out which sites/sports are a priority and provides guidance for how improvements could be made should the resources become available.
- 2.7 It is important that Sport England sign-off the document as this will ensure the sports sections in the Local Plan are supported in the Local Plan approval process. At the time of reporting, we had not received comments back from Sport England. If these are received before the committee we will update Members on the night. It will also ensure that the Strategy can be used for decisions in planning applications and developer contribution negotiations.
- 2.8 It will be a "live document" used to set parameters for maintaining facilities the Council owns. The baseline data can be refreshed periodically to allow quicker decisions to be made based upon changing needs.

2.9 Members approved the recommendations for Rugby, Hockey and Cricket at the previous Community Committees on 31 October 2023 and Football, Netball, Bowls and Tennis on 6 January 2024.

3 Proposals

3.1 This report recommends that the Committee adopt the Playing Pitch Strategy as attached in Appendix I.

3.2 That delegated authority is given to the Head of Environment & Leisure in consultation with the Chair of Community Committee to make minor amendments, should Sport England recommend any final changes

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

4.1 Failure to adopt a Playing Pitch Strategy is not a feasible option given the requirements of Sport England and the value that this robust assessment will give to the developing Local Plan.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 Consultation was undertaken with facility providers, clubs, schools, appropriate National Governing Bodies of Sport, Sport England, Town & Parish Councils, Kent County Council Sports Service, countywide partners, health organisations and local leagues.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The new Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 is has been developed. The Playing Pitch Strategy sits within the ‘Community’ priority. Enabling our residents to live, work and enjoy their leisure time safely in our borough and to support community resilience.
Financial, Resource and Property	<p>This Strategy will ensure that the Council and its partners are providing cost-effective services and are making best use of the appropriate resources and property.</p> <p>By adopting a robust Playing Pitch Strategy, the authority will stand a better chance of being successful with external grants and developer contributions to assist in delivery of the action plan.</p> <p>At this stage, no additional costs to the Council have been identified. However, there may be requests for contributory funding for individual projects as they are developed and which will go through the usual budget request process.</p>

	Any future reviews of the Grounds Maintenance Contract will need to consider the best value that the new contract can provide for pitches.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	<p>The Strategy will underpin key sections of the Local Plan relating to Open Space. This is a required element of the Local Plan process, providing a robust evidence base for decisions. It will therefore assist in the Planning Inspectorate process.</p> <p>By providing a robust strategy that is endorsed by Sport England, the Council will be better placed to defend any challenges which may be presented by developers.</p>
Crime and Disorder	The provision and good management of a broad range of playing pitches and changing rooms can make a positive contribution to managing issues of crime and disorder by providing diversionary activities and encouraging community cohesion.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	Where possible, maintenance regimes which are “environmentally friendly” will be considered and adopted.
Health and Wellbeing	By providing and supporting a broad range of quality facilities across Swale, there will be greater opportunities for people to participate in healthy activities.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	<p>Without a strategy that is endorsed by Sport England, the Borough will be at risk of not having the Local Plan agreed, missing funding opportunities, losing challenges to planning applications by developers, and not providing high quality facilities for its residents.</p> <p>By maintaining its own pitches to agreed standards, the Council will ensure their facilities are safe and fit for purpose.</p>
Equality and Diversity	Issues of equal opportunity will be addressed through applications for any changes to existing or new developments, ensuring that such facilities are compliant and fit for purpose.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Playing Pitch Strategy 2024 - 2038
- Appendix II: Playing Pitch Technical Assessment

8 Background Papers

8.1 [31 October 2023 Community Committee Minutes](#)

8.2 [9 January 2024 Community Committee Minutes](#)