

Housing, Health and Communities Committee Meeting	
Meeting Date	3 July 2025
Report Title	Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) update
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. To note update report 2. That delegated authority is given to the Head of Environment & Leisure in consultation with the Chair of Housing, Health & 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 (PPS) for 2024 – 2040 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 update report provides the current position with regard to the PPS.
- 1.3 The Strategy has been 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. Community and Leisure committee previously signed off stage B of the 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 (NGBs), 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 – 2040. Previous PPS reports have been reviewed by this committee on 6 March 2024, 9 January 2024, 31 October 2023.
- 2.2 The primary purpose of producing the PPS is to provide the Council with a strategy to fulfil effectively the Sport England objectives relating to promoting, protecting, enhancing and providing sports facilities as appropriate and as set out in Sport England's Planning for Sport Guidance. It will achieve this by:
- Accurately auditing the supply of pitches and ancillary facilities, and the demand for pitches, within Swale (from which deficiencies and surpluses in provision can be measured).
 - Assessing whether the current supply (in terms of the quantity, quality, and accessibility of the provision) in Swale is adequate to meet both current and future demand.
 - Developing a clear, succinct and deliverable strategy, in the form of a set of recommendations and an Action Plan which addresses deficiencies and surpluses in provision.
- 2.3 Scope of the study includes:
- Football (including 3G pitches)
 - Rugby Union
 - Cricket
 - Hockey (sand/water-based pitches)
 - Bowls
 - Netball
 - Tennis
 - Athletics

- 2.4 The strategy is developed through a number of stages in accordance with Sport England's PPS Guidance:
- Stage A – Prepare & Tailor the Approach
 - Stage B – Gather Supply and Demand Information
 - Stage C – Assess Supply and Demand Information and Views
 - Stage D – Develop the Strategy
 - Stage E – Deliver the Strategy
- 2.5 Since the last update to committee, the original scope of the study was increased to include Athletics (at the request of England Athletics) and revised population data to 2040 has been provided by Planning. The impacts of these changes needed to be reflected throughout the document.
- 2.6 Consultation meetings with relevant governing bodies have been undertaken with some having already signed off. There has been a steady flow of data between the consultants and the various NGB's.
- 2.7 New up to date data has been included and it is envisaged that stage C will be signed off by the end of June 2025.
- 2.8 Stage D is drafted but requires further work on scenario's particularly relating to planned participation growth proposed by NGBs, but it is aimed to be signed off by the end of July 2025.
- 2.9 This will enable the Strategy to be reported and agreed by Members at the October 2025 cycle of meetings.
- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 It will be a "live document" used to set parameters for maintaining facilities the Council owns and to help influence those owned/operated by others. The baseline data can be refreshed periodically to allow quicker decisions to be made based upon changing needs.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 To note update report.

- 3.2 That delegated authority is given to the Head of Environment & Leisure in consultation with the Chair of Housing, Health & 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 has been 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.
- 5.2 A NGB and Sport England Meeting took place on 6 June 2025 where a revised timeline was agreed for each of the first four stages (A – D).

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Community: To enable 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>
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	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.

	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.
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	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. By maintaining its own pitches to agreed standards, the Council will ensure their facilities are safe and fit for purpose.
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

8 Background Papers

- 8.1 [Community Committee 6 March 2024](#)
- 8.2 [Community Committee Minutes 9 January 2024](#)
- 8.3 [Community Committee Minutes 31 October 2023.](#)