

Progress report on production of the East Devon – Playing Pitch Strategy

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April 2023

Introduction

The Planning Policy team at the Council is leading on production of the new Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) for East Devon and on completion it will supersede the former PPS that dates back to 2015 [Open Space - Playing Pitch Strategy - East Devon](#).

The PPS is concerned with sports that are played outside, as opposed to sports and activities that are played indoors. Indoor sports have been addressed through the Councils Built Facilities Strategy. Though of course there are cross-overs between indoor and outdoor sporting activities, some sports are played (and training takes place) both indoors and outdoors.

The PPS is being produced in very close collaboration with Sport England and sport governing bodies and as drafted at present is specifically concentrating on the sports of, and the pitches/courts used, for:

- Cricket;
- Football;
- Hockey;
- Rugby Union; and
- Tennis

Though reference will be made to other outdoor sports (with some possible potential to further broaden the scope of the strategy).

Timing issues and delays in PPS production

Sport England advise that PPSs should be regularly reviewed and work had started on this PPS a while back. But the pandemic put PPS production on hold and it was then seen as sensible to wait for completion of the Council Leisure Strategy before making substantive progress on the PPS. Local plan production also took on a priority importance in 2022.

The PPS work is now, however, progressing with a projected completion in summer 2023.

Methodology and process for PPS production

The production of the PPS is closely following a step-by-step guidance document produced by Sport England in collaboration with sport governing bodies [pps-guidance-october-2013-updated.pdf \(d1h1m5892gtr7.cloudfront.net\)](https://www.cloudfront.net/d1h1m5892gtr7cloudfront.net/pps-guidance-october-2013-updated.pdf)

This guidance sets out a series of stages for PPS production;

STAGE A – Prepare and tailor the approach

1. Prepare and tailor the approach

STAGE B – Gather information and views on the supply of and demand for provision

2. Gather supply information
3. Gather demand information

STAGE C – Assess the supply and demand information and views

4. Understand the situation at individual sites
5. Develop the current and future picture of provision
6. Identify the key findings and issues

STAGE D – Develop the strategy

7. Develop the recommendations and action plan
8. Write and adopt the strategy

STAGE E – Deliver the strategy and keep it robust and up to date

9. Apply and deliver the strategy
10. Keep the strategy robust and up to date

Meetings have been held with sports governing bodies and substantive progress has been made in respect of Stage A and B. Through close working with sport governing bodies we hold detailed information on sports clubs, the teams they support and the sites and pitches they play at across East Devon. This information has been cross referenced to computer mapping records of sites and pitches that we have compiled with work undertaken on assessing levels of match play at these sites/pitches.

We have completed (through external commission) a non-technical assessment of pitch quality and this assessment work has helped inform the capacity of pitches to accommodate match play and training. Early work has been undertaken on assessing the degree to which pitches are running at, under or over capacity in respect of use being made. There has, therefore, been a body of evidence compiled in respect of Stage C, though more needs to be done and a critical element of future work will be engagement, specifically through sport governing bodies, with clubs and pitch owners/managers to test the robustness of findings.

It is relevant to highlight that the pitches and courts that form part of the assessment are those used by clubs and teams that have open membership policies/practices and/or that are available and accessible for community use. This includes pitches and courts that are in the ownership and/or management of public, private, voluntary, charitable or any other

sectors. Included in the PPS are some school pitches, where some degree of public access may exist, though many schools do not make their pitches available for community use.

Work and completion of Stages D and E will follow on later this year, though in a very real sense Stage E is ongoing.

Outputs from Stage D of the work, following the Sport England guidance and as set out in the previous PPS, will highlight three core themes:

1. **Protect** – which is very much geared around protecting and not losing existing pitches and the capacity they offer to support sports use;
2. **Enhance** – which is geared around improving the quality of and access to existing pitches; and
3. **Provide** – which is concerned with the provision of new pitches.

‘Ownership’ of the PPS

To be effective it is important that the PPS has wide ranging ownership. We would look to have final ‘sign-off’ from Sport England and the sport’s governing bodies and would also wish to see sports clubs and teams and site and pitch operators happy with content. We will also take the PPS to committee of East Devon District Council for formal endorsement or approval.

The PPS is being produced by the Planning Policy Team at the Council and Sport England highlight the need for a PPS to support local plans. In this respect The ‘Protect’ and ‘Provide’ themes of the PPS are very much part of the role and work of the planning service at the Council. However, the ‘Enhance’ theme is much more cross-cutting across council services, especially so in respect of pitches and courts that are owned and/or managed by the Council. Therefore to be most effective and relevant ‘ownership’ of the PPS across a wide range of Council services would be desirable.