

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 27 March 2024

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Delivering our leisure and playing pitches requirements

Report summary:

Full Council and Cabinet have formally adopted the Leisure & Built Facilities Strategy 2021-31 and its Action Plan. There are currently significant challenges in meeting the completion deadlines for each priority within the Action Plan. There are also current requests for support to help deliver new sports pitches in Honiton and also hosting and taking forward the Cranbrook Local Delivery Pilot programme funded by Sport England. Currently, to be able to manage these workstreams, there has been no identification of additional resources both in terms of staffing capacity and new budget allocations. The Council does not have a statutory responsibility for delivering new sports playing pitches or providing sports clubs with new infrastructure however we work with many clubs through the maintenance of playing pitches that are owned and leased to sports clubs and also the Playing Pitch Strategy helps to identify future needs. Therefore, it is recommended to carry out a high level options appraisal of the actions within the Leisure Strategy to develop a costed Implementation Plan with possible options for affordable delivery. This will provide the Council with the necessary financial information to make strategic decisions on what we may wish to deliver from the Strategy going forward. This was one of the recommendations from the recent Peer Review undertaken on the Council

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the appointment of Strategic Leisure to carry out a high level options appraisal of the Leisure & Built Facilities Strategy 2021-31 with an Implementation Plan and possible options for delivery to inform decisions on the affordability of the Council's current and future leisure provision;
2. Recommends to Council to approve funding from the Council's General Fund Revenue budget of £85,000 to help support the Estates team with the priority 1 actions identified within the Leisure Strategy action plan on stock condition surveys and renegotiating existing dual use facility agreements.
3. Approves the request to create posts for the 2024/25 financial year for the Community Connector, Community Builder and Project Manager posts to support the Sport England Local Delivery Project within Cranbrook whilst seeking ongoing funding for the three posts to widen the programme to other areas of East Devon to help deliver the wider priorities within the Leisure & Built Facilities Strategy 2021-31.
4. Recommends to Council the provision of a budget of £76,974 for the 2024/25 financial year to fund the Community Connector, Community Builder and Project Manager posts
5. Approves the request to create a post for a Strategic Leisure Enabler Lead role for the District to take forward the strategic options for leisure provision in conjunction with wider partners and stakeholders.

6. Recommends to Council the provision of a budget of £57,756 inclusive of 30% on costs to fund the Strategic Leisure Enabler Lead role

Reason for recommendation:

To enable the Council to agree a position on what and where to prioritise its future investment in its leisure facilities and activities that are identified within the Leisure and Built Facilities Strategy 2021 -2031 and the draft Playing Pitch Strategy 2024.

Officer: Charlie Plowden, Assistant Director – Countryside & Leisure; Andy Wood, Assistant Director – Growth, Development & Prosperity; Ed Freeman, Assistant Director – Planning Strategy & Development Management; Tim Child, Assistant Director – Place, Assets & Commercialisation.

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

[Equalities impact assessment](#)

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Medium Risk; The Leisure Strategy and draft Playing Pitch Strategy both identify significant areas of work and specific recommendations to action which, if resources are not agreed and put in place, will limit the ability of the Council to make progress in delivering the Strategy’s action plans.

Links to background information [Place partnerships | Sport England; wellbeing - Exeter City Council](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
 - A greener East Devon
 - A resilient economy
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Report in full

Summary of issues

The Council, when it had its in house Leisure Department, provided a comprehensive wrap around service for leisure provision that included sports development and supported the District’s sports clubs in helping to seek funding and improve their sports club infrastructure. This sports

development function ceased in 2006 when the in-house leisure role was transferred to LED which was set up to focus primarily on the running of the Council's leisure centres and swimming pools.

There has been no centralised in house leisure team to help support this area of work since 2006. The various elements of the Council's leisure work has therefore been absorbed since 2006 and built into various teams over the subsequent years. The additional workloads emanating from the Playing Pitch Strategy and sports club liaison as well as from the Leisure Strategy have been taken up by the following service leads:

- Assistant Director – Places, Assets & Commercialisation responsible for the leisure assets and their maintenance, negotiating with sports clubs on leases and fees and seeking funding opportunities for decarbonising our asset stock;
- Assistant Director - Planning Strategy and Development Management responsible for the development of the Playing Pitch Strategy and S106 and CIL funding into leisure and sports.
- Assistant Director – Countryside & Leisure responsible (with Director for Housing, Health & Environment and Director for Finance) for the LED contract and work of the Leisure Strategy Delivery Forum;
- Assistant Director – Growth, Development & Prosperity responsible for Cranbrook's Sport England Local Development Programme in partnership with Exeter CC.

There has been a steady growth in the demands being made of Officers and there is now an opportunity to review this arrangement and consider how best to deliver a more co-ordinated and centralised approach to the work the Council does for leisure and its playing pitches work to help manage the workload.

Following the recent Peer Review one of their questions posed in the financial planning and management section was "What leisure and culture provision do you need/can you afford? What is the timescale for decision making? Conduct benchmarking, visiting, explore options for delivery models, Consider it as a portfolio for leisure...not all sites have everything."

The Peer Review report provides the Council with an external view on our leisure provision and poses the challenge what can the Council afford to provide as a District-wide leisure offer (not as a piecemeal provision). Also, how that may look in our communities and to consider what our funding for leisure will look like in the future with the pressures on budgets identified within our MTFP.

There are currently a number of requests being made of the Council in respect of the following areas:

- Delivery of multiple priority 1,2 and 3 actions from the Leisure & Built Facilities Strategy 2021 - 31
- Leading the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot work in Cranbrook
- Enabling the delivery of the recommendations within the emerging Playing Pitch Strategy 2024
- Delivery of new sports playing pitches in Honiton (Honiton Sports Pitches Strategy 2017)
- Delivery of new sports playing pitches in Exmouth (Exmouth Sports Pitch Strategy 2017)
- A view by some sports clubs who lease land from the Council, that our role is limited to that of landlord and that the Council should do more to support their Club's sustainability and growth – these two roles do not always align

All of these requests require Council resources in terms of staffing time and also revenue or capital funds to facilitate their delivery. None of this work is a statutory requirement for the Council however they are of considerable importance within the sports clubs and their communities who are seeking our assistance.

Therefore, it is imperative that the Council now carries out a high level options appraisal of the "asks" within the Leisure Strategy and from this an Implementation Plan with possible options for delivery that will provide the Council with the necessary information to enable it to make strategic

decisions on what level of leisure provision it wishes to deliver going forward. There are multiple priority action areas which go beyond “business as usual” in our leisure provision and these need to be considered in terms of cost implications before decisions can be made to support them.

The issues that the Council are facing currently in terms of demands from sports clubs as well as our agreed actions in our Leisure Strategy delivery plan are outlined in this report.

1. Leisure Strategy demands & options appraisal.work

1.1 The adoption of the Leisure & Built Facilities Strategy 2021-31 and its associated Delivery Plan has provided the framework for future decisions to be made by the Council and these are considered by the Leisure Strategy Delivery Forum (formerly the LED Monitoring Forum) where a report is updated at every meeting with progress made against the priority 1, 2 and 3 actions.

1.2 There are a number of priority 1 actions which are of critical importance that currently cannot be started due to issues of staff capacity and budget but also appetite by partners (schools). The priority actions are mainly centred on the future management of the school dual use sites, negotiating the annual management fee for LED from 2023/24 onwards and developing a district-wide health and wellbeing programme that helps to provide leisure activities to improve local residents’ physical wellbeing directly in their communities.

1.3 Other priority actions relate to stock condition surveys being required – whilst the building fabric element is more straightforward the specialist mechanical and electrical components require significant external specialist input.

1.4 In respect of renegotiating the dual use agreements there is a key issue here and this is balancing the objectives of the Council with that of the school. Not all schools are receptive – we are seeking to restructure our use of the sites to best fulfil our operational needs (e.g. less demand for use in holidays) and by doing so, reducing our financial commitment. The schools though cannot easily absorb any additional costs, nor do they necessarily require increased usage at those times. Discussions with 4 schools in total to-date have proven challenging with little appetite apparent from Schools. A risk exists that in funding additional resource to take this forward, we’ll still not achieve our objectives.

1.5 The necessity of carrying out a high level options appraisal of the Leisure & Built Facilities Strategy has become apparent with the increasing demands being made of the Council for delivering its leisure provision. This being driven by the ambitions of the Strategy alongside the recommendations emerging from the Playing Pitch Strategy work as well as the cost of subsidising the annual management fee for LED. The Peer Review recognised this and recommended that before any decisions were made to committing more funding to leisure, at the likely detriment to funding for other council services, a high level review of affordability, what a future leisure provision in our district could look like and the options for delivering this were required.

1.6 Therefore, to start to map out how we can meet these challenges it is the intention to commission Strategic Leisure to cover these areas and their workscope will be:

- Hold a series of meetings as appropriate (Officers/Members) to discuss the current challenges of delivering the Leisure Strategy, understand the costs of delivering the Strategy and discuss the potential options for delivering a repurposed leisure provision set against the MTFP;
- Review and confirm Leisure Strategy recommendations and actions
- Cost and resource-plan
- Develop an Implementation Plan (following the Peer Review recommendations)
- Analyse the Implementation Plan and set out the options for delivery (following the Peer Review recommendations)

1.7 This piece of work is critical in providing the Council with the necessary background detail on how it can start to plan for the future with the affordability of its leisure offer, the contract with LED and the likely requests for support emerging from the Playing Pitch Strategy 2024 work. The recommendations and assessment of the leisure provision by the Peer Review team makes this higher level piece of work a priority to be undertaken before decisions can be made at a more granular level.

1.8 The Leisure Strategy's Action Plan priority 1 actions are:

KEY ACTIONS	Priority	Completion	Who leads	Resources needed
EDDC to revisit all stock condition survey data and associated costs within the context of the recommendations from the strategy and the need to retain and invest in its existing portfolio of leisure facilities (priority facilities are Exmouth, Honiton, Axminster). Agree a 5 – 10 year planned preventative maintenance programme of works – capital and revenue.	1	2022/23	EDDC Property & FM Team	Specialist consultancy support to inspect sites and prepare programme of works. Building fabric is more straightforward but electrical and mechanical more specialist hence external input needed. Costs: £70,000 + on costs estimated.
EDDC to undertake a site options appraisal to address identified shortfall in leisure facility provision highlighted within the Leisure Strategy. The priority focus should be on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cranbrook – 6 lane 25m pool, health and fitness, 4 court sports hall, 2 studios (small pool/Leisure Local as a minimum), to ideally align to development of Town Centre • Exmouth - ATP • Honiton - ATP • Axminster – Netball Courts Consideration should be given to new and existing sites and include an integrated offer of new leisure centre(s) provision and separate arrangements for individual sports/activities, working with partner organisations in the community.	1	2023/24	EDDC Leisure Officers EDDC Planning Team Devon County Council Exeter City Council Local Delivery Pilot Relevant schools and sports clubs NGBs	
EDDC to renegotiate all existing dual use facility agreements, in favour of the Council to increase access and value for the East Devon Community. Daytime access is the priority to achieve. Following re-negotiation daytime programmes to be developed focussing on older people.	1	2024/25	EDDC Leisure Officers EDDC Estates Team EDDC Legal team Devon County Council	Additional Estates Resource. These negotiations have been centred around Colyton – resulting in less daytime usage of the Centre but more of hockey and netball outside spaces. Still not concluded and hugely resource intensive. As such, whilst negotiations have already commenced, to deliver those 5 other sites within timescale

				<p>will require such level of resource that other work will need to be back-filled. As such, request £15,000</p> <p>External legal advice is also likely following an assessment on this work by the Head of Legal: £TBD</p>
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2. EDDC Playing Pitch Strategy 2015 & draft PPS 2024

2.1 A new Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) 2024 is in production and is due to be presented as an emerging Strategy to Strategic Planning Committee in March 2024. The work undertaken so far indicates that many of the issues highlighted by the previous Playing Pitch Strategy and Sports Pitch Strategies for Exmouth and Honiton remain. The new PPS 2024 has indicated that though the need for both these towns remains it is not significantly greater than for other towns and so demand is widespread across the district.

2.2 The draft PPS 2024 has picked up from the Football Foundation Local Facilities Plan that there is need for new artificial grass pitches (AGPs) for/at Exmouth, Honiton and specifically one at/to serve between Sidmouth and Seaton (specifically youth size).

2.3 Indeed, increased youth participation since those strategies were produced is driving additional needs for new and improved facilities. The current strategies can be found at: [Open Space - Playing Pitch Strategy - East Devon](#)

The emerging PPS 2024 has carried out substantive work on the evidence gathering side of strategy production, this has been undertaken in accordance with following Sport England guidance. The next stage, as completion of this evidence gathering side finishes, will need to move onto the strategy (the what do we do about it) element of the work.

2.4 Implementation of the PPS can be summarised under Sport England's three categories of work:

- Protect - policies to secure new facilities as part of new developments and to protect existing facilities from development;
- Provide - delivery of new and improved facilities;
- Enhance - management and maintenance of existing facilities.

2.5 The first of these elements falls to the Planning Service who through the Local Plan, Cranbrook Plan and supporting guidance set out requirements for new developments in terms of requirements for new sports pitch provision particularly on large scale new developments which would in themselves require the delivery of new facilities. These are then secured through a Section 106 agreement between the developer and the Council.

2.6 Smaller scale developments where there is not a need for new sports facilities as part of the development itself will pay the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) towards the delivery of infrastructure on the Council's infrastructure list which includes sports facilities. It should however be noted that the sports facilities projects identified in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) are listed as priority 2 projects being " infrastructure that is important to deliver specific

development schemes and meet the needs of new residents, but the precise timing is less critical.”

- 2.7 There is a substantial funding shortfall for infrastructure identified in the IDP with a £70 million shortfall for priority 1 projects alone identified at the time of its adoption in 2017. It will therefore be difficult to fund projects that are not priority 1 projects based on the limited funding available. Spend decisions for CIL monies are made by Strategic Planning Committee having considered the recommendations of the CIL Member Working Group. Due to a lack of staff resource the working group has not been able to meet so far this year but with new posts having recently been agreed by Members it is hoped that officers will be able to support the working groups work again once these posts have been filled early next year.
- 2.8 The delivery of new and improved facilities is where the current strategy has not progressed. These projects do not necessarily fall to the Council to deliver, indeed EDDC has no statutory obligation to deliver them, they are for a range of stakeholders and clubs to deliver. However some relate to land owned and controlled by the Council or would potentially involve negotiations with adjacent land owners that would logically be led by the Council.
- 2.9 At the time of presentation of the Playing Pitch Strategy 2015 and Exmouth and Honiton Sports Pitch Strategies 2017 to Members it was highlighted that there were not sufficient resources budgeted to facilitate the Council’s envisaged role in the delivery of the strategy. It was envisaged that the Council would play an enabling role in its delivery indeed a report to Strategic Planning Committee seeking adoption of the Honiton Sports Pitch Strategy states:
“Members have previously agreed that the Council should play a facilitating role in the delivery of the strategy’s recommendations. This does not obligate the Council to pay for or deliver any of the recommendations in itself but to work with clubs and other bodies towards their delivery. This is likely to involve at a minimum negotiating with landowners, coordinating funding bids and providing advice on detailed plans ahead of planning applications being submitted, but potentially could extend to purchasing land (including Compulsory Purchase Orders), funding a proportion of project costs, and drawing up plans for sites. The extent of this involvement will be dependent on the abilities of relevant clubs and other bodies and the preferences of Members”.
- 2.10 The report noted that there was insufficient resources in place to undertake this role and Members views were sought on how this should be addressed but no resources were committed to this work.

3 Sport England Local Delivery Pilot (Cranbrook)

- 3.1 The Local Delivery Pilot covering Exeter and Cranbrook has been running since 2018. In respect of Cranbrook the programme is governed through the Move More Cranbrook steering group which includes representatives from a range of local partners including the Town and District Councils, LED, Cranbrook Education Campus, Live West, Devon County Council Public Health. The pilot is aimed at tackling inactivity, with the particular focus at Cranbrook being upon families given the age profile of the town.
- 3.2. In recent years a Project Manager has been recruited to support, enable and deliver the programme priorities for Cranbrook. The role has been hosted by Exeter City Council and embedded within the wider Live & Move team with funding provided through the main programme. The role has been vacant since the previous post holder left in August 2023 with funding through the Sport England pilot programme being available for the post until the end of March 2025.

3.3 Key functions of the Project Manager role include the following:

- Co-ordination of the network of capacity within posts funded by Sport England. Bringing colleagues together to share best practice, identify challenges and opportunities within Cranbrook and plan future programme delivery;
- Provide regular updates of progress against agreement project/programme documentation;
- Developing, managing, delivering and evaluating the suite of projects funded as part of Move More Cranbrook;
- Managing the Move More Cranbrook grants process;
- Building and nurturing in Cranbrook with those organisations and community groups that support and promote wellbeing and physical activity work in the town;
- Provide input to support colleagues to capture the impact, learning and tell the story of project delivery within the programme;
- Communication, evaluation and reporting of Move More Cranbrook projects;
- Liaising with key stakeholders in Cranbrook through the steering group and other forums to ensure the effective delivery of projects and programme outcomes.

3.4 Alongside this Project Manager role a further request is being made for the Council's support for a Community Connector (28hrs pw) and Community Builder (18.5hrs pw). The purpose of these two posts is to offer a range of community-based options to enable and empower people to access services to maintain health and wellbeing, reducing the need for statutory care services now and into the future. It is a model of asset-based community development (community building) and social prescribing (community connecting) and has been operating across Exeter for more than 10 years.

3.5 At present, these three Cranbrook posts are hosted alongside the wider Wellbeing Exeter (and Cranbrook) programme, which has a network of Community Connectors and Builders. This arrangement will cease at the end of March 2024. Exeter City Council have agreed a funding package to keep the Exeter side of the programme running but this leaves the posts covering Cranbrook without funding for the next financial year. There is the opportunity to try to secure Sport England legacy funding for these posts beyond this period.

3.6 The key functions of the Community Connector role (28hrs pw) are:

- Receive referrals from the health and social care system and educational establishments for members of the community who are in need of improving their social, emotional or physical wellbeing or who need practical support (e.g. debt support);
- Engage with people referred in a non-judgemental and holistic way, working together to identify priorities, set actions and goals;
- Active listening, motivational interviewing and mapping of a person's assets, drawing out motivations, strengths and passions;
- Introduce people referred to relevant groups, organisations and services;
- Maintain and up-to-date working knowledge of the support and activities available to people within the community from within the community, voluntary and statutory sectors in order to effectively introduce people to appropriate services, activities or sources of support;
- Through undertaking training and development opportunities, gain an understanding of the often complex challenges faced by the people being referred;
- Accompanying people (where appropriate) to groups, services, appointments and meeting to ensure best possible outcomes and supporting them to make sustainable changes;

3.7 The key functions of the Community Builder role (18.5hrs pw) are:

- Map and maintain awareness of formal and informal community activity and provision and identify community assets and resources;

- Listening widely to people of all ages and backgrounds within the community to understand more about people's lives and how they feel about their community;
- Connecting people and opportunities together, creating new networks;
- Encouraging and supporting local people to take action on things that matter to them;
- Creating spaces that allow people to come together, get to know each other, build trust and share skills;
- Advocate for the community and underrepresented areas of the community;
- Helping with local projects;
- Build and maintain internal and external relationships including attending training, meetings and activities;
- Collect evidence of outputs and outcomes, ensuring consistent implementation of the monitoring and evaluation process.

3.8 The request to support these posts has come as Devon CC has withdraw their funding from the Wellbeing programme. Therefore for this strategically important element of the pilot programme to continue it is imperative that East Devon DC can provide secure funding to enable Cranbrook to continue to benefit.

3.9 This report recommends that the three roles which will support activities in Cranbrook are commissioned by the Council. This is on the basis that this would allow the Council to take a more proactive approach to programme delivery. A decision would also then rest with the Council as to whether there would be merit in continuing this role beyond the end of the current Sport England Funding.

3.10 There is a short upcoming window in which the Council has the opportunity to bid for legacy funding from Sport England for a further 3 years by becoming a Place Partner. This bid needs to be made jointly with Exeter City Council as our existing pilot partner. The City Council have committed to submitting the bid by 24 June 2024. It is imperative that we engage constructively and proactively in order to put together a robust joint bid. There is scope within the bid to seek ongoing funding for the three posts discussed in this section of the report but also to widen the programme to other areas of East Devon as well as seeking funding for the delivery of a Leisure Centre at Cranbrook, which is a priority 1 project in the Leisure Strategy. As with all competitive funding rounds, there is no guarantee of success but this presents an excellent opportunity to gain support for the growing new community and to support improved health and wellbeing outcomes across the District. This will be the subject of a further report to Cabinet.

Financial implications:

Recommendation 2 and 3 are requesting one off budget sums of £85k and £77k totalling £162k, it is suggested if approved this should be met from the Council's Transformation Budget. Recommendation 4 is a request for an ongoing annual sum for a new post, initially at £58k, this will have to be met from the General Fund Balance in year one but should be looked to be accommodated within the Leisure budget going forward as efficiency and resource priorities are considered

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report, Legal Services will advise and assist on individual actions as required.