

Paper to LED Forum - 30 March 2021
East Devon Playing Pitch Strategy

**Report prepared by – Matt Dickins – Planning Policy Manager –
East Devon District Council**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A Playing Pitch Strategy, produced in accordance with Sport England guidance, provides an assessment of sport participation levels alongside a critique of pitch supply, quality and availability. In so doing it identifies shortfalls and deficiencies in pitch provision (or potentially areas of over-supply) as well as an overall qualitative assessment (specifically how fit for purpose any pitch is). The strategy also looks forward to identify new or emerging demands, specifically in respect of need that may be generated through population growth.
- 1.2 Outputs from the Strategy should inform future policies and set out specific actions, amongst other matters and taken from Sport England, in respect of:
- PROTECT sports facilities from loss as a result of redevelopment;
 - ENHANCE existing facilities through improving their quality, accessibility and management; and
 - PROVIDE new facilities that are fit for purpose to meet demands for participation now and in the future.
- 1.3 It is important to note that the Playing Pitch Strategy is concerned with outdoor pitch provision (both grass and artificial) in respect of use by and for the organised (usually league based) team sports of Cricket, Football, Hockey and Rugby Union. There needs to be an active level of matches to extend coverage to other team sports, for example Rugby League or Baseball, to warrant their inclusion. Relevant organised participation in other sports does not exist in East Devon and it also relevant to note that the Sport England guidance, and therefore this work, does not extend to cover such sports as Tennis or Netball.

- 1.4 The Playing Pitch Strategy is concerned with all pitches in East Devon that have some element of public use and access regardless of who owns or manages those pitches (i.e. it is **not** just concerned with East Devon District Council owned or managed pitches).

2 The current strategy and future work

- 2.1 We have an existing Playing Pitch Strategy for East Devon, though this was completed in 2015 and is now dated. The previous strategy was produced by the Planning Policy team of the Council.
- 2.2 The 2015 strategy can be viewed at:
<https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/1182367/adopted-east-devon-pps-2015.pdf>
A report to the Strategic planning Committee of the council setting out more details on the proposed approach to producing a new strategy, and background information, can be viewed at:
<https://democracy.eastdevon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=154&MIId=1484&Ver=4>
This committee report highlighted the option to employ consultants to produce the strategy but determined that the work should be undertaken in-house.
- 2.3 The new Playing Pitch Strategy will be produced (again) by the Planning Policy team at the Council and will be one of the evidence documents needed to support production of a new local plan. From a planning perspective the strategy will be particularly important in respect of establishing policy to secure new sports pitch provision alongside development. However, the strategy should ideally have a wide 'ownership', and be endorsed and used by all departments of the Council that have any involvement with sports pitches and their use, management and supply.
- 2.4 Importantly the 'ownership' and application of the strategy should, however, not just be restricted to the Council and its activities. Strategy production requires active engagement with Sport England and the sport governing bodies as well other organisations or bodies with an overview of sports and potentially also individual clubs. The strategy should be looked upon as having a 'buy-in' by bodies and organisation across East Devon.
- 2.5 For the new Playing Pitch Strategy, on which much background work has already been undertaken (though updating is required), a timetable for production is to be determined, but an early stage task will be to renew

contacts with sport governing bodies. It should be noted that previous engagement stalled at the point of the COVID outbreak when, understandably, attention and prioritise shifted away from this work to more urgent needs.

- 2.6 By way of summary of work to date a database has been compiled of every club and each of their teams that play matches in East Devon and also of every pitch (with teams linked to pitches) that is used for the pitch sports. The database includes an assessment, albeit it dated, of the quality of each pitch and any supporting club house or other facilities.

3 Conclusions

- 3.1 As noted in this report work on a new Playing Pitch Strategy is underway and will progress over the rest of this year and into next. Securing wide participation in preparation and collective 'ownership' of outputs will be desirable. The work should, as well, align with wider leisure and recreation work that is being undertaken, this specifically should include the current and ongoing review of physical activity and leisure provision in the district.

- 3.2 The importance of having a new Playing Pitch Strategy in place (specifically in respect of planning policy work) is highlighted by the fact that Sport England made representation on the East Devon Local Plan Issues and Options consultation (on which consultation closed on 15 March 2021) advising:

*“.....it is Sport England’s approach to challenge the soundness of Local Plan documents which are not justified by;
- an up to date playing pitch strategy (carried out in accordance with a methodology approved by Sport England)
- an up to date built sports facilities strategy (carried out in accordance with a methodology approved by Sport England).”*

- 3.3 Our new Playing Pitch Strategy should address the first point above though some further attention will need to be given to having a built sports facilities strategy. It would, ideally, be hoped that the LED work would partly or fully address this need.