

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting 5 October 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## Evidence collection and potential policy approaches for sport and recreation

### Report summary:

This report sets out summary information around ongoing evidence gathering and strategy production in respect of sport and recreation to support policy development in the new local plan.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendation:

- 1) That Strategic Planning Committee note the ongoing evidence gathering to support policy around sports and leisure provision in the new local plan.

**Reason for recommendation:** To ensure that Members are aware of work around sport and leisure provision considerations.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action
- Corporate Services and COVID-19 Response and Recovery
- Democracy and Transparency
- Economy and Assets
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk;

**Links to background information** – See links in the body of the committee report.

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- Outstanding Place and Environment
  - Outstanding Homes and Communities
  - Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
  - Outstanding Council and Council Services
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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The provision of new leisure, sport and recreation facilities, and protection of existing facilities, will be matters to be addressed in the new local plan. Accessible recreation space is critical to human wellbeing and available sporting facilities form an essential part of the overall mix of such provision.
- 1.2 Past work has indicated that East Devon generally has reasonably good sporting facilities, however there are notable gaps in provision and challenges in securing new facilities. Past assessment work showed, for example, a real undersupply of sports pitches in Exmouth and Honiton and there was active work undertaken seeking to identify and secure new pitch provision, but without success. More success has however been achieved in recent years in securing new Artificial Grass Pitches.

## 2 Production of a leisure strategy for East Devon

- 2.1 Through work of the LED forum the consultancy firm Strategic Leisure Consultants were appointed by the Council in 2021 to undertake a Strategic Outcomes Planning Guidance (SPOG) Diagnostic. This is an assessment process, to a methodology established by Sport England, that considers issues around provision and planning for physical activity and leisure provision, with work majoring on sports facilities.
- 2.2 The consultants presented a summary of their emerging findings to the LED Forum meeting [Agenda item - SOPG Diagnostic highlights - East Devon](#) on 6 July 2021, and their final report is awaited. Whilst much of the consultants work looked into the linkages and contracts between the Council and LED Leisure Services there were sections of the consultants work that have a direct bearing on Council activities overall and a specific relevance to production of the new local plan.
- 2.3 One of the headline recommendations coming from the consultants work was that the Council should have a leisure strategy. A report to this same LED forum meeting [Agenda for LED Monitoring Forum on Tuesday, 6th July, 2021, 6.00 pm - East Devon](#) highlighted the importance of a strategy and the minutes for this item record:

***“RECOMMENDED to Cabinet** that a recommendation be made to Council for the approval of a maximum budget of £25,000 towards the production of a Leisure Strategy for*

*the Council which may be part funded from a Sports England Grant with the balance met from the Transformation Fund.”*

- 2.4 At the time of writing this committee report this item has not been taken forward to Cabinet but if, in due course it is approved, it is estimated (see meeting minutes) that the strategy will take around six or seven months to complete subject to appointment of consultants. Against this timetable the leisure strategy will not be available to inform the working draft of the local plan that is scheduled to go to Strategic Planning Committee in December 2021 but it would be hoped that emerging findings at least, if not the final strategy, will be available at the point when a proposed consultation draft of the local plan is presented to Strategic Planning Committee in March 2022.

### **3 Sport England comment on the issues and options consultation**

- 3.1 Sport England is the Government agency responsible for delivering the Government’s sporting objectives. In representation on the local plan issues and options report <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/3722834/sport-england.pdf> they advise that

*“..... a planned approach to the provision of facilities and opportunities for sport is necessary, new sports facilities should be fit for purpose, and they should be available for community sport. To achieve this, our objectives are to:*

***PROTECT*** sports facilities from loss as a result of redevelopment

***ENHANCE*** existing facilities through improving their quality, accessibility and management

***PROVIDE*** new facilities that are fit for purpose to meet demands for participation now and in the future.”

- 3.2 Sport England continue by advising that:

*“..... 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 It is seen as essential therefore that both a playing pitch strategy and a built facilities strategy are in place to underpin and justify policy in the new local plan. For local plan making purposes a key significance of the leisure strategy work, assuming it is undertaken, is that (it is understood) it will include within it or alongside it a built sports facilities strategy.

### **4 Built sports facilities strategy**

- 4.1 The built sports facilities strategy work will major on sports that are typically, or at least often, played indoors frequently in purpose built facilities. The main provider of such sporting facilities in East Devon is LED Leisure Services with sports centres operated in

most of the town's of East Devon. However, there are also sporting centres and facilities in East Devon that are run by other bodies and organisations.

- 4.2 From a planning and planning policy perspective an effective and comprehensive built sports facilities strategy will need to look at the totality of sporting facilities available, the accessibility and use of these by the public and consider issues around whether current provision is meeting demands. The strategy would then continue by looking at what additional provision may be relevant to support future growth and development going forward, though it may be that the strategy could reveal that there are elements of over-provision or there are concerns around the distribution of provision.

## **5 Playing pitch strategy**

- 5.1 A new playing pitch strategy for East Devon is being produced by the Planning Policy team at the council and not by consultants. This new strategy will replace the former strategy [Open Space - Playing Pitch Strategy - East Devon](#) adopted in 2015. Work had started on the new strategy back in 2019, however, with Covid and the associated lockdown sporting governing bodies quite understandably turned their attention to supporting grass-root teams and activities whilst wider strategy and policy development work was put in-hold. Work has now restarted on production of the playing pitch strategy.
- 5.2 It will follow similar processes as the built facility strategy work in terms of looking at playing pitch supply and demand issues and the intent is to specifically look at participation in and pitches available and used for football, rugby union, cricket and hockey. At this stage the assumption is that all other sports will be either addressed through the built facilities strategy work or they are of a minor nature with casual participation only and if played are done so on pitches or grass areas that are managed and available for other sports or on areas that fall as accessible open space. There will need to be on-going review, however, of all sports that are regularly played on an organised basis to ensure that they are covered in one or other of the strategy documents.
- 5.3 It should be noted that the Planning Team while tasked with producing the Playing Pitch Strategy have only a minor role in delivering the projects identified within it for enhancing and improving pitch provision. This is primarily through acting as a source of information and its wider role in identifying infrastructure requirements and priorities through the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and work on CIL funding allocations. Many of the projects will involve work by landowners and sports clubs together with Sport England and governing bodies to progress. The Council will often have a role to play in many cases as landowner and through the leisure and street scene teams as well.

## **6 Relationships with neighbourhood plans**

- 6.1 Many neighbourhood plans place an importance on sporting and other recreational spaces in their parishes. Sporting facilities are seen as important assets for communities and their loss to non-sporting uses would typically be seen as inappropriate. In this respect there is the expectation of clear alignment with Sport England and Government policy and policy expectations of the existing local plan.

6.2 It is relevant to highlight that neighbourhood plans can plan for and propose new facilities with a notable example being the emerging Broadclyst Neighbourhood Plan that is planning for provision of a new Artificial Grass Pitch in the parish.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications requiring comment.

### **Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications other than as set out in this information report though would highlight the advice from Sport England as to the need for both playing pitch strategy and built facilities strategy to ensure no challenge to soundness of any new local plan.