

Report to: **Strategic Planning Committee**

Date of Meeting: 26 March 2019

Public Document: Yes

Exemption: None

Review date for release No document review is planned.



Agenda item: 9

Subject: **Action plan for production of a revised East Devon Playing Pitch Strategy.**

Purpose of report: This report advises of a proposed timetable and work programme for a revised East Devon Playing Pitch Strategy.

Recommendation: **Members are asked to agree the production of a revised East Devon Playing Pitch Strategy in consultation with Sport England and other sporting bodies and clubs to aid future funding bids to support the delivery of new and improved sports facilities in the district and negotiations with developers over provision as part of major developments.**

Reason for recommendation: To gain formal approval for production of a revised East Devon Playing Pitch Strategy.

Officer: Ed Freeman, Service Lead – Strategic Planning and Development Management

Financial implications: The expectation is that a light touch approach will be taken with production of the PPS and that work will be undertaken 'in-house'. However, section 7 of the report highlights circumstances in which it may become necessary to buy-in external help: refer to section 7 for more details.

Legal implications: There are no legal implications at this stage other than as set out in the report.

Equalities impact: Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk

There is a low risk identified and associated with securing approval for this document.

Links to background information:

- Links are provided in the body of the report.

Link to Council Plan: The revised East Devon Playing Pitch Strategy has direct links with – "Encouraging Communities to be Outstanding".

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Members will recall that an East Devon Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) was approved by this Council in June 2015. This strategy was produced in accordance with Sport England (a non-departmental public body under the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) best practice and [guidance](#) for PPS production and the East Devon strategy has been held up as a model document. However, PPSs have a limited shelf life (a revision is recommended after three years) and a refresh is now appropriate (indeed overdue). The approved PPS from 2015 can be viewed via this web link:
<http://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/1182367/adopted-east-devon-pps-2015.pdf>
- 1.2 The existing East Devon PPS establishes the need for sports pitches across the District and it also examines the actual supply and availability of pitches to meet this need. From this demand and supply assessment the PPS identifies where and for what sports there are shortfalls in pitch provision, or potentially where supply meets need or perhaps exceptionally there could be more pitches than are needed. In undertaking this assessment the PPS looks at the scope to improve existing facilities and therefore the potential to address shortfall issues through, for example, more matches being played on the same pitch/es. The PPS also looks at the potential for future sports pitch provision.
- 1.3 The 2015 PPS was specifically concerned with need and supply of pitches for:
- Football;
 - Rugby Union;
 - Cricket; and
 - Hockey
- and was produced through close collaborative work with governing bodies for these sports as well as local clubs, Sport England and other parties. In any refresh the work will look again at these sports noting that other outdoor sports are typically comparatively minor in terms of activity rates and indoor sports and facilities fall outside of the remit of the assessment process. However, if in the course of undertaking the assessment information comes to light around other sports use and demand then it may be relevant to broaden the assessment work or undertake ancillary sports pitch planning work. For example American Football and Baseball are both sports that have seen increased levels of participation in recent years and discussions with governing bodies for these sports would be appropriate.
- 1.4 The PPS covers all pitches across East Devon. This includes both natural grass and Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs), pitches owned by the council, privately owned pitches, pitches on educational sites, pitches in their own right, and pitches provided as part of a recreation ground. Community access (as opposed to being restricted to a professional/semi-professional club or organisation that does not provide such access), is a key issue. The PPS is concerned with need generated from the East Devon population and it also takes into account clubs that may have a home base that lies outside of East Devon but

that play (home) matches in the District as well as East Devon based teams that play (home) matches outside of the District.

2 Key Findings of the 2015 Playing Pitch Strategy

- 2.1 The 2015 PPS showed a general pattern of under-provision of sports pitches across East Devon with a number of pitches in poor condition and therefore not able to support optimum levels of use. There were particular challenges identified in Exmouth and Honiton and for this reason more detailed assessments were undertaken for these towns that specifically looked in some detail at options for enhancing existing pitches and promoted new sports pitch provision. Specific addendum Sports Pitch Strategies were subsequently worked on for [Honiton](#) (adopted) and [Exmouth](#) (draft).
- 2.2 The 2015 PPS contained the following summary of key general issues:
- Provision of youth and mini football and rugby pitches is particularly poor.
 - Management and maintenance of many grounds is poor due to lack of funds.
 - There is a distinct lack of access to all-weather floodlit training facilities throughout the district and need for at least 2 full-size third generation – artificial grass pitches.
 - There are a number of Exeter based clubs that play in East Devon.
 - In general, in addition to existing stock, there is a district-wide need for:
 - 4 new adult football pitches;
 - 6 youth 11 a side football pitches;
 - 4 pitches for 9 aside football; and
 - 6 mini soccer pitches.
 - As a conservative estimate there is a district-wide need for two to three cricket grounds in East Devon.
 - Given aspirations and current supply, shortage of good quality grass pitches will restrict rugby development.

3 Use that has been made of the existing Playing Pitch Strategy

- 3.1 The current PPS has been used and has helped in the following instances:
- Securing grant aid funding for refurbishment of The Kings School Artificial Grass Pitch at Ottery St Mary;
 - Negotiating and subsequently requiring/allocating sports pitch hubs at Cranbrook through the Cranbrook Plan DPD;
 - Securing additional improvements to extant permitted sports pitches at Cranbrook;
 - Protecting existing sports pitches from loss to other uses such as at Winslade Park;

- Protecting and improving the proposed provision of sports pitches at the former Rolle College playing fields in Exmouth.

3.2 There have, however, been proposed or potential projects and initiatives set out in the 2015 PPS that have not made any real progress. Whilst the PPS sets out a strategy and options to support sports pitch provision it is not an implementation plan, it does not in its own right come with funding behind it and does not commit any party (whether this council or anyone else) to take any direct or specific action or to spend money or make investments. In this respect and with limitations on public, voluntary and charitable sector funding (and provision of sports pitches typically not being a money making opportunity for the private sector) there has been some frustration over lack of delivery of some of the suggestions, proposals and aspirations of the current PPS.

3.3 When it comes to securing new pitch provision one of the most effective means to use the PPS and actually see new pitch provision, is in association with larger scale (specifically including housing) development proposals. On sites where larger scale housing development is planned the development, in its own right, will generate a need for new sports pitches and in such development schemes it should be expected that sports pitch provision will be on site. Whilst developer contributions will only be appropriate (or at least can only be legitimately required) to meet the needs generated from the development itself there can be the potential to secure additional funding from elsewhere in order to secure additional and better facilities that can help support a wider need.

4 Proposals for a Playing Pitch Strategy refresh

4.1 Despite limitations on being able to deliver some of the aspirations of the past PPS, though also some notable successes, a PPS refresh is now appropriate. Of critical importance is the fact that Sport England and other funding bodies can be expected to place considerable weight on the existence of a PPS when making funding and investment choices and grant aiding schemes. Funding decisions will typically be based on and need to be backed up by evidence that improvements to facilities or extra facilities are appropriate or required. An up to date PPS is the definitive means and mechanism to identify and demonstrate the case for improvements and investment to be made and in the absence of a PPS it may be very difficult to prove need and therefore to secure such investment.

4.2 There was a considerable amount of time and effort involved by staff in the Planning Policy section of the Council, with some inputs from other departments and also outside partners, into production of the original PPS. Major time consuming tasks involved primary data and information collection along with on-site assessment of all playing pitches identified in the District. 'Behind the scenes' there was also a lot of detailed statistical assessment of the data and information gathered in order to generate robust outputs on need and demand for pitch provision. This body of evidence was then translated into recommended actions and the actual strategy. In order to produce the first strategy it was necessary to employ consultants in order to undertake some of the site assessment work and evaluate new site provision options as well as to undertake some of the statistical assessment and evaluation.

- 4.3 The good news is that for a refresh of the strategy much of the previous work undertaken can be reviewed and revisited and established contacts efficiently contacted to assist with any updating. In many cases the primary information such as numbers of teams that are playing sports and the presence, accessibility and quality of pitches is unlikely to have changed (anecdotal evidence would indicate this to be the case). Therefore whilst there will be a need to review past and current circumstances, the hope is, subject to sport governing body endorsement and that of Sport England, that the assessment work will major on the assumed comparatively limited number of circumstances where changes have occurred.
- 4.4 It is advised that early discussions have taken place with Sport England and they, and the governing bodies of the sports, are happy, in-principle, with the proposed light-touch review of the PPS. A caveat must be made, however, around any assumption that significant changes have not occurred. If new assessment shows that there have been fundamental or significant changes then a light touch review may not be possible and a more in-depth assessment, more akin to wholesale brand new strategy production, may be needed.

5 Methodology and timing for the Playing Pitch Strategy refresh

- 5.1 Whilst it is stressed that the expectation is for a light touch review of the existing strategy it is, nonetheless, appropriate for this review to be undertaken in alignment with and to follow the steps set out in the Sport England guidance for PPS production.
- 5.2 The Sport England guidance on PPS production includes 5 stages broken down into 10 individual steps. These are shown in the table below (first column) alongside succinct commentary on how we propose to undertake them (second column) and envisage timing for the work (third column). With work starting in March 2019 (in reality it actually started before this time, for example a preliminary meeting was held with Sport England and governing bodies in summer 2018) it is envisaged that a final PPS should be completed and ready for formal approval by the Council in late 2019.

PPS - Stages and Steps	Proposed work plan for East Devon District Council Planning Policy team	Timing
STAGE A – Prepare and tailor the approach		
1. Prepare and tailor the approach	We will need to clearly set out reasons and logic for producing the PPS – specifically what we want to achieve and why. Whilst the Planning Policy team, as last time round, will lead on and undertaken the vast bulk of the work, we will also need to identify scope to work with other partners inside and outside of the Council (we have already approached Sport governing bodies). An expectation is that the overall approach and more importantly logic to work on PPS production will not differ significantly (if really at all) to that taken last time round, though it can be expected to be more streamlined.	This will form early scoping work that can be expected to be completed in March 2019 though it will need to be revisited as the PPS work progresses.
STAGE B – Gather information and views on the supply of and demand for provision		

PPS - Stages and Steps	Proposed work plan for East Devon District Council Planning Policy team	Timing
2. Gather supply information	This is the stage of work where we will revisit past sports pitch assessment to establish if and whether circumstances have changed (got better or worse). We will, however, need to specifically identify and assess any new pitches that have come into existence and also record any losses of pitches or factors such as where the quality or usage of a pitch may have changed.	This work is likely to run through March and May 2019 though seasonal use considerations may impact on this (particularly for cricket)
3. Gather demand information	<p>This stage of work is concerned with understanding the clubs in existence and the number of teams that they support. We will contact governing bodies and clubs to review past records noting any changes that may have occurred and this work will also need to look at ancillary facilities (such as changing rooms). This work will, however, also need to take into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any new clubs that have formed and the teams they support; • Any clubs that have ceased to exist; • The latent demand for clubs that may exist (for example the issue that there may be more teams and players if only the pitches existed) or more generally trends in participation; and • Any additional demand or changes that may be expected to occur because of the changing nature or ages of the population and especially as may arise as a consequence of new development (specifically new concentrations of people living in new homes). 	This work is likely to run March to May 2019, though past experience suggests that it can be challenging to get all club responses back in a timely manner. That being the case timing overruns may occur (and/or it may be necessary to make informed assumptions in the absence of third party data supply or the verification of existing data).
STAGE C – Assess the supply and demand information and views		
4. Understand the situation at individual sites	This stage of work melds together information from steps 2 and 3 to build up a picture of how and when and by who existing pitches are being used and whether, on a pitch by pitch basis they are being appropriately utilised. The quality of a pitch, (for example how good the drainage is), can have very significant impacts on the numbers of matches that can be played on it. In contrast artificial grass pitches can be in just about constant use, subject to any limited required maintenance, floodlighting and operational use restrictions. It should be noted that school use of pitches and pitches at schools can complicate assessment on account of potentially taking pitch use out of wider community availability and/or making a school facility available for community use outside of school needs or provision. Use for training as opposed to match use also adds a further degree of complication.	This task requires significant statistical assessment work and would be expected to run alongside parts of the previous steps and on through the summer months – June or July 2019.

PPS - Stages and Steps	Proposed work plan for East Devon District Council Planning Policy team	Timing
5. Develop the current and future picture of provision	Having established a base position in step 4, step 5 will help develop a more complete picture of shortfalls (or potential over-provision) of pitches and use of pitches overall but especially on a geographical need and demand basis (including, for example, whether a club based in a town is playing in that town or needs to travel elsewhere to play). The work will assess site availability for differing sports and for differing clubs and their teams in differing locations. It will, however, also need to project forward into the future to look at pitch availability and use now and look at trends and expectations for the future to judge the degree or extent to which circumstances and pitch availability will suit and match-up to where we may be at future times.	From previous assessment and further analysis this stage should be undertaken alongside step 4 and into July/August 2019.
6. Identify the key findings and issues	Step 6 summarises and reviews the working through Steps 1 to 5. We will have a good understanding of the key findings and issues with pitch provision and the adequacy of provision to meet both current and future demand.	This task should be completed in July/August 2019.
STAGE D – Develop the strategy		
7. Develop the recommendations and action plan	This stage of work is concerned with taking the technical work from steps 2-6, drawing it all together and turning it into a plan of action – what do we want to do and where do we want to do it. This is expected to include a number of ‘what if’ scenario testing exercises that subsequently lead to specific recommendations and actions for specific sites and sports. An output from this work (as included in the 2015 PPS) can be expected to be outcomes around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect – guidance and recommendations on protect the use of pitches that already exists (unless demonstrably over-supply is identified). • Enhance – making better and best use of existing facilities and pitches; and • Provide – identify potential opportunities to provide new pitches. 	This task should be completed in August 2019.
8. Write and adopt the strategy	This stage involves formally writing, consulting on (if appropriate) and adopting the strategy.	Projected to have a draft strategy for consultation in September and a final strategy for adoption in December 2019.
STAGE E – Deliver the strategy and keep it robust and up to date		

PPS - Stages and Steps	Proposed work plan for East Devon District Council Planning Policy team	Timing
9. Apply and deliver the strategy	<p>The PPS should be regarded as the key document within the study area guiding the improvement and protection of playing pitch provision. It needs to be the document people regularly turn to for information on how the current demand is met and what actions are required to improve the situation and meet future demand.</p> <p>The Sport England guidance highlights potential uses to include in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports Development Planning - helping with planning with and for sports facility provision; • Planning Policy – informing and assisting with preparing future policy options and choices; • Planning Applications – including supporting applications and resisting inappropriate loss of pitches; • Community Infrastructure Levy – including assisting with making funding decisions; • Funding Bids – providing evidence to inform and justify bids; • Facility and Asset Management – informing management decision in respect of facilities; • Public Health - informing public health actions and decisions; • Co-ordinating Resources and Investment – helping to plan and manage investment decisions; • Capital Programmes - Provide evidence to justify protection and investment and inform programmes of works; and • Monitoring delivery – the recommendations and actions of and in the PPS should be monitored. 	This is ongoing work after the PPS has been approved.
10. Keep the strategy robust and up to date	<p>There should, ideally, be an annual review of the strategy which the Sport England guidance advises “<i>should not be regarded as a particularly resource intensive task</i>”. Full data review (like this proposed review) should be undertaken every three years.</p>	Annual review is recommended

6. A Steering Group for Playing Pitch Strategy Production

- 6.1 The Sport England guidance stresses the importance of joint working on production of the PPS. For the 2015 PPS the work was predominantly lead and undertaken by an officer in the planning Policy team. There was, however, a multi-disciplinary officer working group drawn from different parts of the Council that were of particular value in respect of Stage B and Stage D.
- 6.2 There was also, and has remained over the years, a steering group led by Planning Policy staff that draws together Sport England, Active Devon and representatives of sport

governing bodies to coordinate information collection and sharing, and collaboratively discuss and agree the strategy inputs, outputs and action plans. Agreement and sign off through such a working party is seen as essential in order to demonstrate wide ranging buy-in and robustness to and of the PPS.

7 Possible need for employment of consultants

- 7.1 It is hoped that it will not be necessary to employ consultants to help with production of the PPS review. However if significant and technically complex matters arise, resources (specifically staff time) are not available or stretched or other concerns arise then it may be seen as necessarily or relevant to buy-in external help to assist with the work. This is, however not the favoured outcome and, in-principle, it is seen as far more desirable to undertake work 'in-house' and develop skills and systems to undertake all relevant tasks. In the event that consultancy support is needed to complete the work then it is envisaged that this would be paid for from existing budgets.
- 7.2 Notwithstanding the desirability of doing all the work 'in-house' there are two areas or aspects of the work, highlighted at this stage, which may require buying-in external help in relation to Stage C and steps 4, 5 and 6 of the methodology;
- a) **Data analysis** – at various points in preparing the PPS, perhaps most significantly at Step 5, there is a lot of data assessment and analysis. This assessment work could prove to be quite complex and we may see the need to buy-in external help to assist with this element of the work.
 - b) **Detailed assessment of current and future pitch potential** – the 2015 PPS and the follow on Exmouth and Honiton studies involved some detailed survey and assessment work of existing (including previously used) pitches and examination of land with potential for future use. This work involved buying-in specialist external consultancy support to undertake and assess topographic issues (the slopes and changes off in level of land) and therefore any earth moving requirements, the makeup of soils and hence suitability for sports pitch use, potential drainage issues and other allied tasks. If for or as a product of production of this PPS there is a need or desire to look in detail at sports pitches then there may be a need to buy-in such specialist advise again. Work of this nature, beyond a superficial level, is certainly not work that the Planning Policy team are qualified to undertake and it is not known if other teams at the Council have the skills sets or available time to undertake such work. Having said all this the expectation is that it is unlikely that we will need further assessment work, but this will not become clear until after initial stages of evaluation are undertaken.

8 Potential for joint working with other local authorities

- 8.1 There is potential for joint working on the PPS. Working with or in parallel with other local authorities there would be potential to produce separate but aligned PPSs. The adopted PPS is based on a needs assessment that was carried out jointly with Exeter City Council,

and there is an opportunity to potentially produce another joint needs assessment to ensure PPSs adequately consider and address cross-boundary issues.

- 8.2 Joint working can have attractions and under many circumstances can be desirable. Local authority boundaries often mean little to people going about their everyday lives and where they live, work, shop, visit services and in respect to sports and playing fields where they play. The 2015 PPS showed that a number of Exeter based sports clubs play their home games in East Devon and some East Devon based/originating clubs, notably playing hockey, travel to Exeter to play. Of course league structures, and distribution of teams within them, may also pay little or no regard to local authority boundaries. Joint working has potential to be more in tune with realities of how many people live their lives and play. It also may offer opportunities to save money and develop shared skills and otherwise coordinate effort and deliver collective solutions.
- 8.3 Joint working does, however, require shared agenda's and commitments, it does rely on running to agreed and potentially parallel time scales (maybe running to the timescale of the slowest partner) and does potentially require doing things in the same way with lesser scope for differing authorities to choose specifically what they feel may best meet their objectives or aspirations.
- 8.4 Officer level discussions with neighbouring authorities (particularly across the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan area) have identified the opportunity to work together with Exeter City Council once more. In time, should external consultancy support be required, then this could present an opportunity for cost sharing. It is understood that Mid Devon and Teignbridge district councils are not currently in a position to review their PPSs, though clearly there will be a need to keep this situation under review as the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESp) progresses. At this stage, although potential is noted, joint working is not proposed.

9 Delivery of the Playing Pitch Strategy

- 9.1 It is highlighted that production of a playing pitch strategy could be reasonably undertaken over 2019 and that such a strategy would be expected to include a number of recommendations. In some case, such as resisting losses of playing pitches if planning applications propose development on them, the PPS can have immediate and obvious application. But where new facilities may be recommended through the strategy delivery can be far more challenging. The Council does not have a specific team or staff dedicated to playing pitch delivery and new facilities can be very expensive to provide and time consuming for staff.
- 9.2 In some quarters it might be read or inferred that because the District Council has produced the strategy (with the Council logo on the front cover) it will or should be the Council that will provide facilities and make them available, as well as potentially managing and maintaining them. Whilst the District Council do provide some pitches, and for example have scope to spend section 106 monies and perhaps other council funds, direct provision is increasingly rare and challenging.

- 9.3 It does, therefore, need to be stressed with communities and sporting clubs that taking the lead on new facilities provision will often need to fall to them with the District Council typically taking a supporting rather than lead role.

10 The Option of not having an up to date Playing Pitch Strategy

- 10.1 It is highlighted, that there is no absolute obligation on the council to have a PPS, though the National Planning Policy Framework, at paragraph 96, stresses the importance of understanding need and opportunities for provision, it effectively steers councils towards having a PPS.
- 10.2 Many council's in England do not, however, have an up to date PPS and some may regard production, in a world of diminishing resources to be a luxury that can't or would choose not to afford. Perhaps in some cases it may be considered that the possible benefits that a PPS may deliver are unlikely to materialise anyway or if they did they could generate liabilities (as well as benefits it must be hoped) that Councils are not able or may choose not to afford.
- 10.3 Furthermore having a strategy for playing pitches (or indeed a strategy for or on anything) implies that you are setting out a process or thinking on actions you will take in the future. Having a strategy, that to some degree is a pre-determinant on actions you would presumably then wish to follow, may be seen to reduce the ability to be flexible and nimble in approach when responding to opportunities and unknowns that may arise at any given time and in a way that suits at that time. There may also be a reputational issue for the Council, any Council, in having a PPS that may identify and recommend courses of action (e.g. potential for new sports pitches) if the Council has no real means or resources to deliver them and there are no alternative options or means to secure delivery.
- 10.4 Set again the possible benefits that may be argued for not having a strategy must be the positives that are highlighted in this report. It is also noted that there may be other formats and processes that differ from the Sport England approach to strategy production that may exist. These are not however known to officers and it would seem odd, given that Sport England are a statutory body in respect of sporting matters, and otherwise grant aid pitch provision and improvement, to not follow the approach they advocate.
- 10.5 There would also be options to delay PPS production and in terms of supporting planning policy production there may actually be some arguments to undertake the PPS work to dates and deadlines geared around supporting Greater Exeter Strategic Plan and new East Devon Local Plan production and/or implementation. However any delay (and the longer the worse) would diminish the credibility of undertaking a light-touch review and instead place the onus on producing a full scale review. A full scale review could actually be more complex and time consuming in the long run and would increasingly lead to a time where we lack an up to date PPS and therefore have a weaker position when it comes to dealing with some matters that a PPS may support, specifically including supporting bids for funding.

- 10.6 At this stage it is not formally proposed but there could also be potential to look at combining a new PPS with a much larger piece of work assessing built and indoor sports facilities. This would, however, be more complex and time consuming and more likely to require buying-in external consultancy advice.