

Report to: Leisure Strategy Delivery Forum

Date of Meeting 16 September 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



Update on Playing Pitch Audit

Report summary:

This report summarises the key findings of the 2025 Playing Pitch Audit of current facility provision and will form part of the evidence plan for the emerging local plan.

The report explains how the information will inform decision making in relation to current and future provision which will inform an update to the Playing Pitch Strategy for adoption in the Autumn.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☐ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the Forum notes

The findings of the 2025 Playing Pitch Assessment (Appendix 1 be noted) which will be used to review the Playing Pitch Strategy to be submitted to the Forum later this year prior to adoption; and

highlight any areas that warrant further discussion.

Reason for recommendation:

To provide the Forum with an update on the delivery of an updated Playing Pitch Strategy in order to provide the services and facilities necessary to support the residents of East Devon

Officer: Mike O'Mahony, Leisure Manager mike.o'mahony@eastdevon.gov.uk;

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☒ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☒ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

The impact of the Playing Pitch Strategy on the protected characteristics groups and the implications for the Public Sector Equality Duty, will be considered during final development of the strategies in the autumn. It is intended that the strategy will be generally positive for all

groups and will promote equality for all by taking into account the accessibility of buildings and their location.

The provision of quality facilities for sport and physical activity is a key influence on health. It is important that there are choices for participation for people of different interests, ages, income groups and abilities and in different locations so that residents have access to opportunities that suit them.

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Medium Risk;

The primary risk is a failure to secure the collaborative approach required to deliver the strategy. There is however good partnership working across the sports sector and a consensus among key organisations to work together on the key issues affecting existing and future provision.

The local plan policy should/will be used to determine planning applications and if the local plan does not reference a completed PPS there is a danger that it (the PPS) will carry lesser weight in determining planning applications (getting the best outcomes that the council wishes to achieve).

If the PPS does not make progress towards being endorsed for use in determining planning applications, then there is a risk that relevant evidence will not be available when significant applications are considered throughout the District.

The level of future income / grant opportunities may be limited; and/or priorities for spending on strategic projects could lie elsewhere.

Links to background information

- Previous updates to the Forum –
- January 2025 - [Playing Pitch Audit and Strategy Update.pdf](#)
- April 2025 - [Playing Pitch Audit and Leisure Strategy Action Plan Update - April 25.pdf](#)

Appendix 1 – Key Headlines - [App 1 Summary of Findings.docx](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
- ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services

Glossary of Terms

| Term | Definition |
|------|------------------------------------|
| CIL | Community Infrastructure levy |
| PPS | Playing Pitch Strategy |
| IDP | Infrastructure Delivery Plan |
| NPPF | National Planning Policy Framework |

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The previous Playing Pitch Strategy was undertaken in 2015. It has formed the framework for the Council's approach to Playing Pitch provision over the past 10 years. It was developed under the requirements of previous national planning guidance and identified gaps in provision and suggested policy approaches to address the deficiencies. This work has influenced the development of facilities in the District to help achieve active and healthy communities and inform policies in the draft local plan.
- 1.2 Guidance is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012 DCLG)
- “Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up to date assessments of the need for open spaces, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessment should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses in open space, sports and recreation facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreation provision is required.”
- 1.3 East Devon's Leisure Strategy 2021 – 2031 identifies the current and future built leisure facility needs of East Devon's population through to 2031. The Council's Playing Pitch Strategy will identify outdoor sports pitches and facility needs. This will provide the Council a complete overview of leisure provision and requirements across the District. The Leisure Strategy sets out what the vision for Leisure in East Devon
- ‘Our role is essential in facilitating and enabling provision of good quality, accessible, and inclusive leisure for both residents of, and visitors to, East Devon because of the positive impact being active has on our health and wellbeing, and the contribution it makes to national and local public health initiatives.’
- 1.4 The PPS forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and its findings will feed into future updates of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and other Development Plan Documents, which, to date, have been based on the 2015 PPS findings.
- 1.5 The IDP will set out the updated requirements for sports infrastructure on sites of new housing development, including any provision standards the council may wish to apply, and inform the charge rate for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which will contribute to strategic sports provision.
- The policy tests for planning obligations are that the obligations must be:
- necessary to make the proposed development acceptable in planning terms;
 - directly related to the proposed development; and
 - fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development
- 1.6 The production of this PPS started in 2019 before the pandemic occurred. The pandemic, however, put production of the PPS on hold whilst other matters in the sporting world took priority. Many NGB staff were furloughed. In 2022 work was restarted and refreshed, however it has required additional resource through commissioning Strategic Leisure to complete the PPA to reach planned completion in summer 2025.
- 1.7 Consultants Strategic Leisure PLC were appointed to conduct the audit which was completed in August 2025. This work was conducted in accordance with specific methodology prescribed and validated by Sport England and relevant governing bodies.
- 1.8 In January 2025, the Forum re-affirmed the Vision and Objectives for this project. These are based on the original Playing Pitch Strategy that was endorsed by Cabinet in 2015.

Vision:

The vision of the PPS is to ensure that sufficient pitches are provided of a good quality and which support the needs of each sport and the clubs around East Devon taking account of cross-border considerations with adjoining local authorities. This provision should be sufficient and flexible to deal with current and projected increases in demand.

- 1.9 The purpose of the Audit is to provide information on this existing provision and the long terms needs of the area, enabling decisions to be made on which spaces and facilities should be protected or improved whilst identifying provision which may no longer be suitable. It also identifies gaps in provision and suggests policy approaches to address deficiencies in quantity, quality and accessibility.
- 1.10 The Audit forms part of the evidence base for the PPS. The PPS will be used to help guide investment from a range of bodies (including but not limited to the Council) in pitch sport facilities around the district. (including but not limited to these below)
- Developer contributions raised through Section 106 Agreements (S106)
 - Developer contributions raised through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
 - Council capital and maintenance budgets;
 - Clubs (both their own finance and to access grant funding;
 - Town and parish councils;
 - Sport England;
 - National Governing Bodies (Football, Cricket, Rugby, Hockey, Tennis);
 - Active Devon / Devon County Council;
 - LED; and
 - Others.
- 1.11 From the findings of the audit, the PPS will be updated. This strategy will set out in detail the council's approach to local and strategic sports provision, reinforcing the planning guidance and setting out the council's aspirations to maintain the borough's reputation for quality leisure provision.

2.0 Process and summary of findings

- 2.1 The assessment comprises a number of key elements, as summarised below:
- A review of relevant national, regional and borough-wide plans and strategies in order to set the assessment within its policy framework
 - An assessment of the existing and future needs of the borough taking into account predicted demographic, cultural and environmental changes to the end of the Local Plan period of 2042.
 - A review of the quality and quantity of the borough's existing sports and recreation facilities, including use made of the facilities, access in terms of location, and opportunities for new and improved facilities. The PPS will be used as the primary document to inform planning obligations for infrastructure associated with planning applications.
 - A survey conducted by questionnaire of parish and town councils and ward councillors to gain views on existing provision and future needs.
 - Interviews with local facility providers and clubs.
 - Mapping of facilities and review of distance thresholds and provision standards to determine supply and demand for facility provision and where deficiencies currently exist and where they may exist in the context of demographic and housing supply changes.
- 2.2 A brief summary, focussing on the current deficiencies and projected deficiencies by 2042 if there are no changes to current provision, is set out at Appendix 1. These assessments form the evidence base for the strategy and accompanying action plan that will set the priorities for

future provision. The consultant's conclusions and recommendations for the future will follow within the Playing Pitch Strategy.

3.0 Current Status

3.1 The project has a number of key stages. The latest developments are:

- **Completed Stage A - Prepare and Tailor Approach for East Devon**
Review the audit and demand work completed to date and what has changed since the 2015/16 PPOSS and the most recent audit in 2022. Meet with all pitch NGBs and Sport England and check if in the light of identified changes in terms of pitch numbers/quality, Re-do all audits as it should be completed every 5 years and 2025 updates need to reflect latest trends and changes. (i.e. girls football)
- **Completed Stage B – Supply and Demand Data**
Identify Supply - qualitative and quantitative audit of all agreed facility types. We will audit summer sports first and then winter sports. Confirmation of any technical Pitch Power assessments undertaken since 2021.
- **Completed Stage C - Supply and Demand Analysis including views**
 - Understand how each site is being used.
 - Develop current picture of provision
 - Identify the key findings and issues
- **In Progress with Stage D - Developing the strategy and action Plan**
Develop any new scenarios relevant to the new Local Plan and assess impact against the findings of the supply and demand assessment to provide a deeper understanding of the local pressures as smaller geographies throw up some real localised concerns around need and supply balances.

4.0 Next Steps

4.1 The next steps are

- **Completion of Stage D – Developing the Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan.**
Develop Recommendations for future provision – based on Protect, Enhance, Provide principles as set out by Sport England.
Develop facility type and site-specific action plans
Provide draft and final reports
- **Completion of Stage E – Write Draft Playing Pitch Strategy**
Completion of Draft Playing Pitch Action Plan. (key to managing expectations)
Consultation prior to formal adoption by Cabinet and by Full Council.
Apply and deliver the strategy

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 This report provides an early indication of the headlines emerging from the Stage C – Supply and Demand Analysis. Whilst challenges exist, East Devon District Council will use this audit to help inform its PPS and investment decisions, to support bids for grants and funding and in setting standards and levels for new sports pitch provision.

- 5.2 It will also be used as evidence to help determine planning applications and inform future planning policy requirements in the new East Devon local plan or other planning policy documents.
 - 5.3 Other bodies are encouraged to use the Audit findings and PPS to inform their investment and improvement plans and the Council will use the strategy to inform decisions on partnerships that it may enter into.
 - 5.4 This work support efforts to ensure that the sports facilities in the District continue to provide a choice of quality and accessible opportunities for participation in sport.
-

Financial implications:

Delivering the aspirations for enhanced or new infrastructure would require significant capital expenditure and ongoing revenue expenditure which would be sought from a range of sources.

Any proposal for new provision would be accompanied by a robust business plan so the financial implications are fully understood. The council will continue to secure S106 Developers' Contributions (S106) or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) towards improvements to facilities in accordance with NPPF policies for planning obligations.

Additionally, grant funding and other sources of capital will be explored to provide or improve those sports facilities where planning obligations cannot be justified. It is expected that further reports would be brought to Cabinet for individual plans requiring financial support from this council. Any on-going revenue costs would need to be met from within approved budgets.

Legal implications:

As noted in 5.1, full Council's approval may be required to the revised Strategy when it is in its final form. This should be addressed at the point that the draft Strategy is submitted to Cabinet for approval, by way of Officer recommendations stage.