

Future delivery of playing pitch provision across Swindon borough

- 6.1 The application of the Playing Pitch Methodology and a detailed analysis of the supply and demand for pitch sports across Swindon has been set out in sections four and five.
- 6.2 The key issues for each of the sports arising from this analysis are set out below:

Sport	Issues
Football	<p>The PPM identified significant shortfalls in provision of junior and mini pitches, which were evident across all areas of the borough. These shortfalls are in sharp contrast to adult football provision, where it is evident that there are more than sufficient pitches to meet the needs of pitch users. The North Cluster is the only area where provision is sufficient to meet demand from all age groups of football. Consultation undertaken supported these findings. In terms of adult pitches, concerns primarily centred around the quality of provision which was perceived to be poor and the associated costs of these facilities. As may be expected, representatives of players at junior and mini age groups were more concerned with an overall lack of provision and access to facilities. Latent demand for football is also perceived to be relatively high.</p>
Cricket	<p>Analysis using the PPM indicated that there are high pressures on existing cricket pitches. Some cricket teams currently travel out of the borough as they are unable to access pitches at the peak time. Furthermore, teams indicated that the quality of public pitches in the borough does not meet their needs and that there are perceived to be issues surrounding the specialist maintenance of pitches and wickets. A lack of pitches and poor quality pitches were highlighted as the key barriers to the further development of cricket. These issues have also been attributed to the decline in the number of cricket teams playing in the borough. A lack of training facilities was also highlighted as prohibitive to club development.</p>
Rugby	<p>While PPM calculations indicated that the provision of rugby pitches in the borough is sufficient to meet the demands of rugby clubs, pitch provision is perceived to be inhibiting growth in participation at a junior level. While facilities at Supermarine Rugby Club were considered excellent, Swindon RUFC highlighted that their pitches were deteriorating in quality due to high levels of use, particularly as a result of the expanding junior section. Local authority facilities were perceived to be lacking in quality. In light of the growth of participation in rugby by young children, demand is likely to outstrip supply in future years. A shortage in the supply of pitches may therefore inhibit increased participation in future years.</p>
Hockey	<p>Hockey clubs indicate that access to appropriate synthetic facilities is difficult in light of the number of teams each club is running. Analysis using the PPM reinforces these pressures on hockey pitches. Clubs indicate that some provision in the borough is inappropriate for the purposes of hockey and have therefore expressed concern regarding playing venues for next year. Demand for synthetic facilities is likely to increase in future years as hockey clubs look to develop and enhance their junior sections.</p>

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6.3 Ensuring the appropriate distribution of pitches across Swindon to meet local needs and existing and future demand is particularly important in light of:

- the significant population growth anticipated over the next few years and outlined in the draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy, which will see large housing developments extending the urban area of the borough, increasing the population by almost 20,000 people and consequently enhancing demand significantly
- the modernisation and redevelopment of the school estate, which will both impact on and provide significant opportunity for, pitch provision in the borough
- the higher proportion of younger residents in comparison to national trends, impacting on the demand for mini and junior residents
- the increasing pressures on existing green space sites for development in light of the projected population changes
- the need to increase the current low levels of participation in physical activity in order to combat obesity and other health related issues.

6.4 This section details:

- the vision for the delivery of pitches
- aims and objectives
- the principles of the strategy
- recommended actions for the next five years across each geographical area of the borough.

Vision for pitch provision across Swindon borough

6.5 While Swindon Borough Council has a central role in planning, providing and co-ordinating provision of playing pitches, partnership working is key to the successful delivery of pitches across the borough. Parish Councils, voluntary clubs and private companies are all key providers of pitches in Swindon. Schools are also becoming increasingly important, with many offering significant facilities for use by the local community outside of school hours.

6.6 The raising profile of the health agenda and the need to reduce inequalities and poor health through increased physical activity increases the importance of the effective provision for pitch sports across the borough.

6.7 Consultation undertaken as part of this strategy highlights the importance of local pitch provision to residents of the borough and reinforces the importance placed on the quality of facilities and value for money by clubs.

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6.8 The vision for this strategy is therefore to:

“facilitate the delivery of a network of well distributed playing pitches which are fit for purpose, contain appropriate ancillary accommodation and offer value for money, meeting the needs of existing and future residents. “

Aims and objectives

6.9 The achievement of the overarching aim for the strategy for improving the delivery of pitches across the Swindon borough is focused on:

- ensuring the quantity of pitches is sufficient to meet the needs of residents now and in the future
- ensuring each pitch is of the expected quality and design to serve the purpose it was intended
- maximising access to facilities and;
- managing the facilities in the most effective way.

6.10 It is essential that this Playing Pitch Strategy is not treated in isolation, but that links with other strategies are recognised and the opportunities to achieve wider objectives through pitch provision are sought. The report should be a key driver in the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the open space needs assessment and the green infrastructure study, which is currently underway.

Quantity

Ensure the quantity of pitches in the borough is sufficient to meet the needs of local residents for now and in the future

6.11 Playing pitch methodology calculations highlight shortages of pitch provision across the borough, indicating that there are significant pressures on the existing pitch stock. These shortfalls are particularly apparent in terms of junior pitches, with many clubs indicating that they are forced to travel outside to access pitches. While demand for cricket facilities also exceeds supply on the peak day, many clubs indicated that they choose to travel outside the area in order to use higher quality facilities.

6.12 Playing pitches are often under threat from other, non-sport development. National Playing Fields Association research highlights that one pitch in the country is lost to development every day. In light of the growing pressures for additional housing development in Swindon borough, protection of pitches will become increasingly important over the coming years.

6.13 Swindon Borough Council will therefore ensure that pitch provision in the borough is sufficient to meet the needs of local residents now and in the future through the implementation of the following policy objectives:

- 1) **Ensure that all playing pitches are afforded protection within the emerging Local Development Framework.** Sports pitches should not be developed unless it can be demonstrated through the application of both the playing pitch methodology and PPG17 that the site is:

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- surplus to requirements in terms of demand for pitches and not providing an important local amenity (where there is a deficiency of other forms of open space planning permission should be subject to securing the use of some of the land to reduce the deficit (s))
 - not surplus to requirements but the proposed development will secure the conversion of other land to substitute the land lost
 - provision to an equal or higher quality is provided.
- 2) **Meet identified deficiencies through:**
- the redesignation of existing pitch sites
 - creation of new facilities where appropriate
 - increasing access to pitches
 - improving pitch quality.
- 3) **Ensure that all new developments contribute to the provision of outdoor sports facilities** through the use of S106 agreements. Where quantitative deficiencies do not exist, money should still be required for qualitative improvements. Emphasis should be given to:
- pursuing a strategic approach at local authority level
 - the need to link the corporate strategy and Best Value work of authorities with the process of negotiating new and refurbished sports facilities
 - joint working between sport and leisure professionals and land use planners
 - the provision of sound justification for what is sought from developers and other applicants for planning permission.

6.14 New pitches are already planned as part of some of the large-scale development areas in the borough. Areas where particular impacts will be seen include:

- the proposed loss of two football pitches as a result of a development of 600 dwellings at Pipers Way. The resulting S106 payment is anticipated to be invested in the Croft Leisure Centre. The impact of this development will be discussed further later in this section.
- the Eastern Development Area, as identified in the draft RSS (EDA is likely to be the focus for 12,000 new dwellings). As yet, there has not been an indication of the potential sports pitch and other provision associated with this development, however, the additional residents that this scheme will result in will have significant implications for the demand for sports pitches in this area. This will be returned to later.
- Wichelstowe will be the location of up to 4,500 new dwellings – again generating significant additional demand for pitches. The S106 agreement for this site has been agreed and is likely to include stand-alone recreation sites and provision available to the community at a new secondary school site.

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- the Northern Development Area (NDA) is earmarked to include a development of up to 350 dwellings
 - changes in the school estate including the opening of a new learning campus within the NDA (pitches included within PPM calculations), the redevelopment of the former Hreod North School and Moredon Primary School site as part of the NDA improvements, the closure of Saltway School (although the playing fields will remain), the closure of Windmill Hill School and Freshbrook Primary School with a proposed redevelopment on the former Freshbrook site and sale of Windmill Hill site, proposed school redevelopment at Shawridge Primary School and Toothill Primary School, the redevelopment of Sevenfields Primary School and the creation of an all through Academy on the Pinehurst site to replace the existing Headlands School.
 - it is expected that the development of the Academy on the Pinehurst site will provide an opportunity for enhanced pitch provision, including multi-use games areas, for use by the local community.
 - proposals that involve the loss of playing fields at the former Brimble Hill Schools and Uplands Schools have recently been agreed by the DfES under the Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act on the basis that the playing field spaces were re-provided for these schools at their new location within the Learning Campus at the NDS.
 - The redevelopment of playing pitches at Oakfield Primary School has also recently been taken forward with the creation of replacement junior football pitch and multi-use games area.
 - The impact of these developments and the specific opportunities arising will be returned to later in this section.
- 4) **Ensure that the quantity of provision is above the minimum standard** – some degree of spare capacity is an integral part of playing pitch provision for the following reasons:
- to accommodate latent and future demand for existing pitch sport teams
 - to enable the development of new clubs and teams
 - for the development / expansion of new pitch sports (such as mini-soccer and 'tag' rugby)
 - to accommodate backlogs and for rest and recovery periods.

Quality

Ensure the quality of pitches in the borough is sufficient to meet demand both now and in the future

- 6.15 Provision of quality facilities is essential to encourage people to participate. In addition, it impacts not only on the quality of play, but also on the potential capacity of a pitch.

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- 6.16 The quality of pitches in Swindon is varied, and there is a perception that some facilities represent poor value for money and fall below the minimum acceptable standard. Cricket clubs in particular highlighted the poor quality of public facilities in the borough. Improvements to pitch quality will be essential to maintain and increase participation rates in the borough.
- 6.17 In order to effectively meet demand, the Swindon Borough Council will therefore facilitate the delivery of improved quality facilities through the implementation of the following policy objectives:
- 5) **drive a rolling programme of improvements across Council pitch sites.** This will improve capacity at pitch sites, drive increases in participation, improve access for all groups and enable higher participation levels to be maintained over a sustained period. All facilities should meet with National Governing Body Standards in terms of both the quality of pitches and ancillary facilities.
 - 6) **provide advice to all partners** in the maintenance, improvement and **enhancement** of their facilities
 - 7) **operate a policy of rest and recovery at all pitch sites**, ensuring that the quality of pitches does not deteriorate over the course of a season or from season to season.

Enhancing accessibility

Maximising access to pitches in the borough

- 6.18 Access to outdoor sports facilities is of particular importance, as sites are only highly valued if they are accessible to the local community. An inaccessible facility is of limited value to the local community as a sports facility, regardless of the quality of the space.
- 6.19 Access to school sites is a frequently raised issue across the UK, with many good quality playing fields sitting unused on peak days. The use of school facilities across Swindon borough is high, with over 60% of all playing fields available for use by the community. The forthcoming extended schools and Building Schools for the Future Programmes offer further opportunities for investment, along with new schools built as part of the development areas.
- 6.20 Currently the use of school pitches by community groups is up to the individual school; therefore not many schools currently operate under a formal community use agreement. However, those schools in areas of deprivation often open their facilities for community use free of charge.
- 6.21 Consultation highlighted that as part of the school developments; if possible, all new facilities will include a MUGA and playing pitches. The type of playing pitch depends on the curriculum requirements of the school and a steer from the school on the type of sports they would like to develop.
- 6.22 Any new school builds are designed in such a manner that the changing provision can be opened and accessed from outside the school, and are available

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independently to the school. This removes the logistical issue many schools encounter when considering allowing community use of their pitches.

6.23 Ensuring this open access policy and encouraging schools to permit community use may require genuine financial commitment from the local authority to improve playing surfaces and capacity, provide or improve changing accommodation. The Building Schools for the Future programme may offer opportunities to enhance community use of facilities in future years. The extended schools agenda may also facilitate the use of school facilities for community use.

6.24 Increasing access to pitches at school sites ensures that resources are maximised. Swindon Borough Council will therefore ensure that access to pitches within the borough is maximised through the following policy objectives:

8) **Improving Access to School Pitches** - school pitches can provide a crucial resource for community sport in Swindon. Opening up school facilities provides a key opportunity to address local facilities and ensure that all residents have access to facilities near to their homes. Despite this, schools are frequently reluctant to open up their facilities for community access and clubs may not be attracted to using them. Reasons include:

- poor drainage and lower quality maintenance of some school pitches – this was perceived to be the key barrier to enhanced community use raised by schools in Swindon
- access to appropriate changing facilities
- schools need to ensure that pitches are playable for their primary purpose – curricular use. This restricts opportunity for community use of the site.
- the use of school pitches can frequently be governed by the school term times. In addition, it is common for schools to change pitches from football to cricket for the summer term, which may not correspond with the requirements of community use teams.

The Council should support schools in drawing up formal community use agreements which secure the use of the facility for use outside school hours where there is local community need. These agreements should facilitate the use of these facilities and ensure long-term access.

9) **Ensuring facilities are accessible to all through compliance with DDA** - the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) of 1995 received additional powers in October 2004 when an additional phase came into force. This renewed focus upon disability rights has not only introduced greater legal powers in the protection of disabled persons legal rights, it has also reinforced awareness of existing legislation in this area. The implications of this are considerable as all goods, services and facilities – whether charged for or provided free of charge – are covered by the legislation. Providers should ensure that:

- people are not treated less favourably
- service providers must make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, such as providing extra help or making changes to the way they provide their services

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- service providers may have to make other reasonable adjustments in relation to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access.

The full Code of Practice is downloadable from <http://www.disability.gov.uk>.

Improving the current and future management of facilities

Ensure that facilities are managed in the most effective way

- 6.25 Efficient management and maintenance of facilities is as important as the quality, quantity and access to the facilities.
- 6.26 Pitch bookings are managed by Swindon Commercial Services. Teams book for a season and are essentially allocated a home pitch, paying weekly to play their matches on this pitch. This system has been implemented long term and has received only isolated complaints.
- 6.27 All Council pitches have a standard price at £56 per week for pre booking, with an additional charge for casual use, however consultation has highlighted there is limited demand for casual use of the pitches. In the winter, the Council discourage outdoor training and encourage teams to use local sports halls or STPs.
- 6.28 The Council operates a pricing hierarchy, whereby pitches at Lydiard Playing Fields and Swindon County Ground are charged at a higher rate as a result of the perceived higher quality of these facilities.
- 6.29 Consultation highlighted few issues with regards the pitch booking system and the majority of issues centred around the perceived value of money for pitches.
- 6.30 The Council continue to take a hands on approach to the delivery of pitches at the current time and should look to maintain and improve this service through:
- 10) **Ensuring the pitch booking system remains simple and efficient to use** – this should be reviewed on an annual basis in consultation with users. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of school facilities with formal agreements in the system to facilitate access to these sites.
 - 11) **Ensure facilities offer value for money** – 33% of clubs indicated that they would be willing to pay more if the money was invested back into the pitch sites and quality was improved. Despite considerable issues regarding the quality of pitches, 67% of clubs would not be willing to pay more if standards were raised.
- 6.31 As identified previously, the key emerging general issue was cost of hiring pitches in light of the perceived quality of many public venues.
- 6.32 The prices of pitches in Swindon, alongside those of other authorities where data was available in Wiltshire are set out overleaf.

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LA Name	Adult Football	Junior Football
Swindon	£55	£42
Kennet	£50 (Astroturf)	
Salisbury	£30	£17
North Wiltshire	£55	£23

6.33 The average price for pitches in Wiltshire is therefore

- Adult football - £47.50
- Junior Football - £27.30.

6.34 It can therefore be seen that Swindon borough charges higher fees than the other Councils in Wiltshire. This is particularly significant for junior pitches, where fees are almost double those of other authorities and may be considered to be inhibiting participation.

6.35 It is therefore recommended that the pitch pricing system be revised across Swindon borough as a whole with particular attention focusing on prices for using junior pitches.

- 12) **Promote joint and partnership working across the Council and with key stakeholders in the provision of playing pitches** through the development of a joint working group. The group should involve key stakeholders across the city including leisure and grounds maintenance, Parish Councils, Education, Sports Development, Key Clubs and Planning. Consideration should also be given to the development of increased partnership working between clubs, through the development of specific forums for particular sports in the borough.

The principles behind the strategy

6.36 All suggested actions are linked to the overriding themes and detailed policy objectives and are based on the principles of:

- provision of a network of sites across the borough - ensuring that all residents have access to local facilities of sufficient quality
- sustainability - ensuring the long term sustainability of pitch provision
- economies of scale – promoting enhancement of larger sites where possible and avoiding use of single site pitches
- maximising resources – promoting the use of all facilities by the local community
- partnership working – between key stakeholders and providers of pitches

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- partnership working between all sectors of the community – including the concept of multi sports villages / sport hubs, where the incorporation of wider services offers an opportunity to cross subsidise sporting provision courtesy of assured rental income on the site. Examples of other partners include, health, education/skills, community development, social facilities, and private sector.
- maximising opportunity – ensuring that opportunities presented through the significant growth and development of Swindon borough are maximised and that changes to the school estate are for the benefit of residents now and in the future.

Recommendations and actions

- 6.37 The suggested key actions and areas for further investigation are set out in the tables overleaf. Tables 6.1 – 6.6 give consideration to the adequacy of provision to meet current and local needs in the five geographical areas of the borough. Sources of capital and revenue funding are then discussed in the text that follows.
- 6.38 Recommendations referring to boroughwide provision as a whole are not discussed within the area specific actions, but should be implemented as detailed within the specific policy objectives.

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