

## **ADOPTION OF 2024 PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY AND UPDATE ON LOCAL FOOTBALL FACILITIES PLAN REFRESH**

### Report of the Deputy Chief Executive Place and Regeneration

#### **1.0 MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 1.1 2024 Playing Pitch Strategy
- 1.2 Developing new 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation artificial pitch provision
- 1.3 Further to the Communities & Transport Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2024, Members requested information around the PPS methodology and relevant background information.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Sport England (SE) recommends that Playing Pitch Strategies (PPS's) are undertaken roughly every five years to ensure that any changes to pitch infrastructure, sports participation, political boundaries and housing developments are captured. There is a clearly defined approach to be followed when developing a PPS.
- 2.2 PPS's summarise the supply (pitch provision) and demand (participation data) of pitches for football, rugby, cricket, hockey and lacrosse and provides a sound basis on which to develop policy and make informed decisions for sports development and investment.
- 2.3 The PPS supports our Local Plan evidence base, helping to inform strategic need within the planned period and providing a mandate to seek developer contributions that can be used towards strategic projects to help meet shortfalls.
- 2.4 The PPS is also used to inform the priorities of the boroughs Local Football Facilities Plan (LFFP), outlining options and opportunities for future pipeline projects. The LFFP is referred to by the Football Foundation (FF) when making grant decisions.
- 2.5 Stockport's previous PPS was undertaken in 2017. Since then, several significant factors have occurred, most notably Covid-19 and substantial growth in the affiliation of certain sports. The Council therefore commissioned KKP to undertake a full refresh of the PPS and this work has recently reached completion.

#### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 SE recommends that all local authorities have an up to date PPS that has been developed using the standardised methodology outlined in their PPS Guidance.
- 3.2 The PPS methodology has five stages:

Stage A: Prepare and tailor the approach (step 1)

Stage B: Gather information and views on the supply of and demand for provision (steps 2 & 3)

Stage C: Assess the supply and demand information and views (steps 4, 5 & 6)

Stage D: Develop the strategy (steps 7 & 8)

Stage E: Deliver the strategy and keep it robust and up to date (steps 9 & 10)

3.3 Progression through each stage is based on a partnership and steering group led-approach comprised of Officers from across the Council and representatives from SE, The FF, Cheshire FA, Manchester FA, The English Cricket Board, Cheshire Cricket Board, England Hockey, England Lacrosse and the English Rugby Football Union.

3.4 The five stages outlined in 3.2 are comprised of 10 distinct steps:



3.5 Stages A – C are presented in an Assessment Report, providing a snap shot of the supply vs demand of pitches in the borough. Stage D is presented as scenarios and recommendations in a proceeding Strategy Report with Stage E ongoing after PPS adoption.

3.6 Because the PPS includes both summer and winter sports, the full process takes typically 12 months from commencement to adoption.

## 4.0 FINDINGS OF THE 2024 PPS

- 4.1 Club affiliation data has shown a profound increase in participation across all sports and in Women's & Girls and Youth age-group football in particular. Whilst this is a great achievement, it has none the less presented a challenge regarding pitch capacity.
- 4.2 Demand is being met for hockey and Saturday cricket. For football, rugby, lacrosse and Sunday cricket there is a shortfall of grass pitches and of 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Artificial Grass Pitches (3G's). It is worth noting that most GM authorities have pitch shortfalls and Stockport's position is not uncommon.
- 4.3 The previous PPS also identified shortfalls and although great strides have been made to develop new 3G pitches across the borough since the last study, the supply vs demand balance remains in deficit due to this unprecedented growth in affiliation and participation.
- 4.4 Although 3G's are recognised as durable, safe, year-round playing surfaces and able to withstand intensive use and all kinds of weather, concerns have been raised about the environmental impact of these pitches, specifically relating to the microplastic rubber infill getting into the ecosystem and the need for greater focus on the end-of-life recycling of pitches.
- 4.5 Sport England, working with relevant partners, are actively exploring alternative artificial pitch systems, more sustainable infill products and increasing recycling capacity available to sports providers nationwide. Examples of this include the Football Foundation's significant investment in its own UK 'test hub' to research alternative infill materials, which is expected to yield results in 2025.

## 5.0 REDUCING SHORTFALLS – DEVELOPING NEW PITCH PROVISION

- 5.1 The way in which shortfalls are addressed is approached differently depending on the surface type and tenure arrangement.
- 5.2 The study suggested that most of the identified grass pitch shortfalls could be met by better utilising current provision, such as through improving surface quality and drainage, installing additional sports lighting, improving ancillary facilities, where possible bringing any disused pitches back into use and enabling access to existing unused provision, such as at unavailable school sites. This means that new grass pitches are not necessarily required.
- 5.3 This can be achieved via a number of ways, outlined in the table below:

Grass Pitches	
SMBC owned	Annual pitch maintenance programme carried out in the off-season to improve drainage, lighting, line markings etc.
	Work with Clubs to asset transfer facilities, opening up additional funding opportunities as described below.
Club owned/Leased	Pitch Power Assessment
	Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund (6 year tapered funding support)

	Grass Pitch Maintenance Machinery Fund
	Grass Pitch Drainage Fund
	Grass Pitch Storage Fund
	Multi-sport Pitch Improvement Fund

- 5.4 3G provision is approached differently and forms the pipeline projects that make up the LFFP. The LFFP is a short, well-defined 10-year investment plan that is driven by the priorities set out in the PPS but has the benefit of being flexible enough that additional projects can be added as new opportunities come to light locally.
- 5.5 Council Officers are continually working with local Clubs and key stakeholders to support mutual aspirations to develop additional 3G's that would serve the local community and further meet shortfalls. Since the previous study was undertaken, six new 3G's have been developed with another due for completion in Spring 2025.
- 5.6 The table below outlines the key considerations when determining 3G viability:

<b>Land</b>	Availability	
	Suitability	Can it house a full size pitch?
		Is there space for suitable parking provision?
		Is there space to accommodate suitable changing provision?
	Proximity to residential dwellings (floodlighting)?	
<b>Finance</b>	Capital sources	Developer contributions
		Football Foundation grant
		Club match funding
		Developer includes pitch construction in scope of residential development works
	Revenue/Business Model	Development of User Matrix
		Identification of 'Key Partner Clubs'
		Wider use/social responsibility
	Secondary spend opportunities	
<b>Operating model</b>	Forward Business Plan to ensure operational sustainability	Does the operator have a long term vision for facility
	Technical knowledge around pitch maintenance	Is the operator equipped to maintain the pitch provision in the long term

5.7 The Council is continually reviewing opportunities against this matrix to develop new pitch provision. We are currently having discussions with a number of Clubs across the borough that have aspirations to develop additional 3G pitches.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATION**

6.1 To note the 2024 PPS completion, methodology and approach to developing new 3G provision.

6.2 To note the formal adoption of the 2024 PPS by the Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport and the Cabinet Member for Parks, Highways & Transportation Services.

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