

Outdoor sports facilities

Definition

- 10.1 Outdoor Sports Facilities is a wide-ranging category of open space and includes natural or artificial surfaces either publicly or privately owned which are used for sport and recreation. Examples include playing pitches, athletics tracks, bowling greens and golf courses with the primary purpose of participation in outdoor sports.

Picture 10.1 – Northampton Road Playing Fields



Specific strategic context and consultations

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland; Playing Fields Assessment and Strategy February 2003

- 10.2 Although the document is very broad in terms of its geographical coverage, the following observations were made relating to pitch provision in Harborough:
- there is an apparent oversupply of pitches due to difficulty accessing certain rural pitches, the result being a relatively low usage of these pitches
 - a large proportion of teams use school pitches through 'informal' agreements
 - transport is a key issue for young people due to the rural nature of the District
 - there is an unmet demand in Thurnby
 - the overall quality of football pitches is considered satisfactory and meets the demand of teams
 - there is considered to be an under supply of junior football pitches in comparison with the expanding demand

SECTION 10 – OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES

- a number of Cricket clubs have folded which has been partly attributed to poor quality facilities.

10.3 The plan identifies a number of strategic priorities for Harborough including:

- support of plans to develop land into mini pitches at Symington Recreation Ground for Harborough Mini's FC
- investigate the development of adequate recreational provision near housing developments
- support the development of a new grass pitch at Hall Park, Hall Lane, Bitteswell
- support plans to develop ancillary facilities at Husbands Bosworth CC, Lutterworth Rugby Club, Dunley Way and Great Glen Recreation Ground.

Local plan

10.4 The Local Plan recognises the significance of playing fields and sports pitches and indicates that they will normally be protected from development because of their recreational value. Planning permission on existing sites would only be granted if:

- the proposals are in association with the use of the land for recreation; or
- sports and recreation facilities on the site can best be retained and enhanced through the redevelopment of a small part of the site; or
- suitable alternative facilities are provided in the locality; and
- the development is in keeping with the scale and character of the surrounding area.

10.5 The plan also recognises the important contribution made by private recreation facilities to the overall level of recreation facilities within the district. The plan acknowledges that the full potential of all these resources is not currently utilised and states:

“the District Council will continue to encourage and support the public use of private recreation facilities including the dual use of educational facilities”.

Sports club consultation

10.6 Sports clubs from across the district were consulted to provide their views on sports provision within Harborough. This will be analysed in more detail in section 14 when discussing Indoor Sports and Recreation.

10.7 There were, however, a number of specific references to outdoor sports facilities that it is important to highlight. The following issues were consistently raised as problems with outdoor provision:

- lack of changing facilities at the majority of venues
- insufficient football pitches
- pitch booking system unfair
- poor accessibility to private pitches, especially schools
- insufficient training areas for clubs.

SECTION 10 – OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES

- 10.8 Clubs from both Thurnby and Foxton stated that insufficient pitches and training areas are restricting their ability to develop. The lack of accessible pitches was also considered a problem in Fleckney and Scraftoft. In Scraftoft, there are a number of disused sports pitches on the former De Montfort University site. This site is currently inaccessible to the local community.
- 10.9 Sports clubs have a number of ideas on how they would like to see outdoor sports provision within Harborough improved:
- more all weather pitches and multi-use games areas for training purposes
 - ensure facilities are accessible to all
 - develop school sport facilities to link with sports clubs to supplement and enhance present club facilities and opportunities
 - improved maintenance of pitches
 - provision of extra changing facilities.

Quantity

- 10.10 As recommended by PPG17 the audit and analysis has included golf courses, school playing fields and private recreation grounds. Even though these may not be available for formal community use they may provide some recreational value. A detailed playing pitch analysis in accordance with the latest Sport England Guidance (*'Towards a Level Playing Field'*) would enable a more realistic assessment to be made on playing pitches within the district of Harborough).
- 10.11 The Playing Fields Association (NPFA) provides minimum standards for the provision of outdoor playing space. The standard recommends a minimum of 1.6 – 1.8 ha per 1000 population of outdoor sports facilities, covering playing pitches, bowling greens, tennis courts and athletics tracks. These are national standards and do not account for the local context or the demographic analysis of the local area.
- 10.12 The existing Harborough Local Plan recommends the use of the NPFA Standard.
- 10.13 Existing outdoor sports provision is equivalent to 398.49 hectares. This includes golf courses, athletics tracks and all other outdoor sports provision including an aero flying sports club. There is outdoor sports provision located in all five areas of the district. Provision in relation to the population is particularly high in Peatling and Bosworth, equivalent to 22.03 hectares.
- 10.14 Consultation indicated that opinions regarding the level of provision of outdoor sports facilities is almost equally divided, with just over 50% of respondents suggesting that there was a deficiency.
- 10.15 PPG17 indicates that the provision of outdoor sports facilities is usually demand led, suggesting that it is possible to develop and use a quantity standard for outdoor sports facilities. Previous experience however suggests that due to the wide-ranging definition of this typology, a quantitative standard is relatively meaningless.
- 10.16 A 9-hole golf course is around 30 hectares in size and hence distorts any quantitative standards. It is also inappropriate to quantify demand for different types of pitches, courses and courts within the same standard.

SECTION 10 – OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES

- 10.17 The existing Leicestershire County Playing Pitch Strategy considers provision in Harborough on a district level, and applies the NPFA 6 acre standard to groups of wards in order to provide an insight into local levels of provision. It is therefore recommended that a detailed playing pitch assessment for Harborough District is undertaken, using the new Sport England Methodology “Towards A Level Playing Field” in order to set a local standard, for formal outdoor sports pitch provision.
- 10.18 Provision of other outdoor sports facilities, such as golf courses, should be demand led, rather than based on the application of broad quantitative standards.
- 10.19 Therefore from the analysis it is recommended that no local standard is set at this stage, and further research on types of facilities within the overall typology is undertaken.

Quality

- 10.20 The quality of outdoor sports facilities in the district is good, with 81% of sites rated as good or very good. Only 6% of the total sites were considered to be of poor quality. Only cemeteries and churchyards have a higher quality rating than outdoor sports facilities within the district.
- 10.21 In Market Harborough and Lubenham, 83% of sites are considered to be good or very good. The only site with a poor rating in this area is the artificial turf pitch at Welland Park. All other sports facilities within Welland Park received positive ratings. A ball court area has recently been built at Burford Green Recreation Ground at a cost of £45,000 and is rated as a very good quality facility.
- 10.22 No sites within North East Rural area are deemed to be poor or very poor and 91% of sites are rated as good or very good.
- 10.23 Kibworth, Fleckney and Central has the lowest percentage of sites rated as good or very good, 57%, and 29% of sites are rated as average. Lodge Road Sports facilities in Fleckney are seen as poor quality facilities.
- 10.24 In the Western area, 82% of sites are viewed as good or very good including sites such as the various sports facilities at Coventry Road in Lutterworth. 70% of sites in Peatling and Bosworth are rated as good or very good.
- 10.25 Sites from across the district, which may need some attention with regard to quality are the playing fields at Walton Village Hall, Ullesthorpe Recreation Field and the Tennis Courts at Gilmorton where the accessibility is also rated as very poor. Investigations into these sites should be considered.

Accessibility

- 10.26 The accessibility of 65% of outdoor sports facilities in the district was rated as good or very good while access to only 10% of facilities is considered to be poor.
- 10.27 Like the assessment of quality, accessibility of outdoor sports facilities in Market Harborough and Lubenham is positive with access to 65% of sites rated as good or very good. Only the School Playing Field in Lubenham is considered to have poor accessibility.
- 10.28 The North East Rural area has 43% of sites with very good accessibility and a further 35% rated as good. A number of schools sites in Thurnby and Bushby were deemed to have poor accessibility which may be an area that could be improved with better partnership working.

SECTION 10 – OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES

- 10.29 In Kibworth, Fleckney and Central area there are sites with poor or very poor accessibility ratings. Similarly, in the Western area, accessibility was generally viewed as positive, however there were a number of sites with poor accessibility such as Claybrooke Parva School Playing Fields.
- 10.30 Peatling and Bosworth contains two sites with very poor accessibility, one of which was a private cricket ground owned by Laughton and Mowsley Cricket Club, the other being St Nicholas School in Mowsley.
- 10.31 The majority of sites that were given poor or very poor accessibility ratings tended to belong to educational establishments, indicating that these facilities are not available for use by the general public. Consultation cited the university pitches next to Scraftoft Campus as an example of facilities that could be valuable to local clubs if accessible.

Catchment

- 10.32 The views of Parish Clerks on the time they are willing to travel to reach outdoor sports facilities is illustrated in table 10.1 below. As a result of the broad range of facilities included within this typology it is difficult to make any solid conclusions. People for example are likely to travel much further to use an athletics track (due to the scarcity of such facilities) than to a football pitch.

Table 10.1 Time prepared to travel

		Overall - Harborough District - Parish Councils						Members
		Median	Mean	Mode	Min	Max	75%	General Consensus
Walk		10	15	10	5	60	15 minutes	
Cycle		10	8	10	3	20		20 minutes
Bus		10	10	5	5	30		
Car		8	8	5	1	20	10 minutes	15 minutes

- 10.33 Consultation highlighted a number of different viewpoints regarding the time people are prepared to travel in order to reach outdoor sports facilities.
- 10.34 Responses varied from people who felt 5 to 60 minutes walk would be appropriate, while some respondents felt car journeys of up to 20 minutes would be acceptable.
- 10.35 Many people also indicated that they were willing to cycle to reach an outdoor sports facility and both the mean and median suggest that they would cycle for 10 minutes.

SECTION 10 – OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES

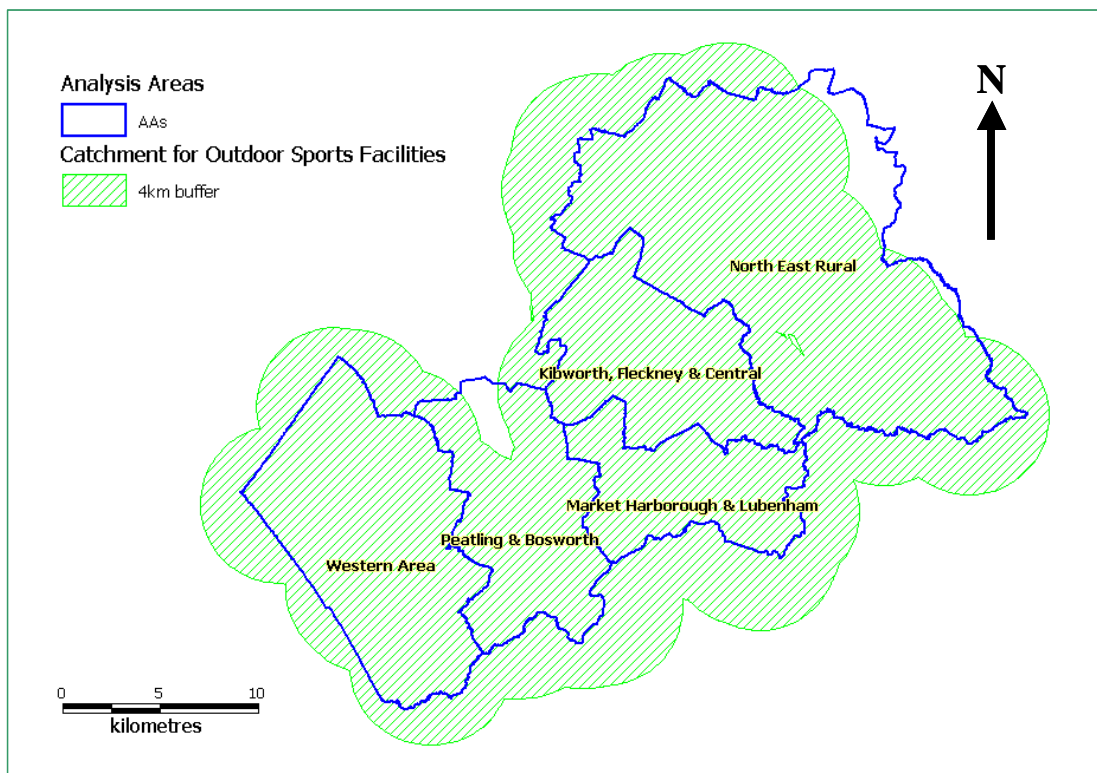
10.36 75% of respondents suggested that they would expect to drive for and between 10 and 15 minutes but overall it depends on the likely duration of the activity what sport facility is sought. It is acknowledged by residents that they may have to travel further to participate in more unusual sports.

Table 10.2 Recommended Accessibility Standard

Local Standard – Outdoor Sports Facilities	
Recommended Travel Time	Estimated equivalent distance
10 - 15 minute drive	4 - 6km

10.37 Figure 10.1 overleaf illustrates the application of this standard for outdoor sports facilities within the district. All maps are provided in Appendix O which demonstrates clearly the areas outside the recommended catchment area.

Figure 10.1 - Accessibility Threshold – Outdoor Sports Facilities



10.38 As can be seen in Figure 10.1, the only area within the district that lies outside of the recommended catchment is the area on the North East border of the district. However although the map gives the impression that all people are within easy access of outdoor sports facilities this typology is a wide-ranging one does not necessarily mean all people are within easy access of playing pitches for example.

Assessment of value (Usage v Quality v Accessibility)

- 10.39 Most sites that have a high level of use would normally have a good or very good quality and accessibility rating. Most sites with a low level of use have an average or poor quality and accessibility rating as factors are related and interlinked.
- 10.40 The popularity and value of sports facilities within Harborough is clear – all but one site is considered to be used either often, or very frequently. This indicates that outdoor sports facilities have a vital role to play, and as a priority, consideration should therefore be given to improving those sites which are of poorer quality or accessibility.
- 10.41 Lodge Road Sports Ground is the only site on which usage is low. It is suggested that this results from the poor quality of the site. The only other site considered to be of poor quality – Gilmorton Tennis Courts, is still highly valued and well used, despite its shortcomings with regards to quality.
- 10.42 Despite the high quality and usage of most of the sites, a number of facilities, primarily school playing fields, have low accessibility. These include:
- School Playing Fields - Gilmorton
 - Fernvale School - Thurnby and Bushby
 - St Lukes School - Thurnby and Bushby
- 10.43 Partnership working at these sites represents a significant opportunity to enhance the accessibility of these sites, and the facilities available for the local community.

Summary

- 10.44 It is considered inappropriate to set standards for outdoor sports facilities as a result of the wide-ranging definition of this typology. Development should be demand led, and a detailed, district-wide playing pitch strategy should be undertaken, to develop a robust local standard for pitch sports.
- 10.45 Outdoor sports facilities are a highly valued typology, and all pitches with the exception of Lodge Sports Ground, where the quality is low are very well used. Investigations of improvements to enhance user satisfaction could therefore be undertaken for this site. Overall, the quality of pitches within the district is good, with over 80% good or very good.
- 10.46 Sports clubs would be keen to see improvements to outdoor sports facilities, in particular the development of changing and training facilities.
- 10.47 Accessibility is also considered good, although there are a number of school sites which have limited accessibility to the public. Improvements in partnership working could therefore be considered to increase the opportunities for outdoor sports in the district.