



Harborough District Council

Report to Services and Communities Scrutiny Panel Meeting of 6 February 2025

Title:	Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E Review
Status:	Public report
Key Decision:	No (Not a decision-making report)
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Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Simon Galton – Portfolio Holder Cllr Jo Asher – Culture, Leisure, Economy and Tourism
Appendices:	Appendix A – Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E Review 2024 Appendix B – Recommendations and Action Plan

Summary

This report presents the outcomes of the Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E Review for scrutiny.

The Playing Pitch Strategy review has been produced in consultation with National Governing Bodies for sports, Sport England, Sports Clubs, Sports Facility Providers and officers of the Council.

The Playing Pitch Strategy Review makes recommendations and provides an action plan for the sports of:

- Football
- Cricket
- Rugby Union
- Hockey
- Tennis
- Bowls
- Outdoor Netball
- Rounders

The overall purpose of the Playing Pitch Strategy review is to update both the evidence base and the strategic direction for the provision of outdoor sporting facilities in Harborough District. The Strategy will help inform the Council and partners' priorities for sport as well as providing important evidence to support the Local Plan and the associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP).

The revised Strategy provides a recommendation and action plan to satisfy Sport England requirements and informs future investment in outdoor sport and recreation.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Panel review and comment on the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) Review before it proceeds to Cabinet and Council for adoption.**
- 2. The Panel to discuss the following questions and any other relevant questions before providing comments to Cabinet on this report:**
 - a. Does Scrutiny Panel agree that the report has sufficient clarity, especially with regard to how the outcomes are to be delivered (para 1.2.1 of the report at Appendix A)**
 - b. Does Scrutiny Panel have any comments to make on the recommendations and actions of the report at Appendix A?**
 - c. Does Scrutiny Panel feel that there is sufficient support provided by the report at Appendix A for the preparation of the new local plan?**
 - d. Do members feel there is sufficient understanding of the interrelationship between the contents of the PPS at Appendix A and the policies of the new local plan/ have any comment to make concerning the review of the PPS with regard to the preparation of the new Local Plan?**
- 3. That the Services and Communities Scrutiny Panel recommend the Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E review to Cabinet for adoption by the Council.**

Reasons for Recommendations

The Review of the Playing Pitch Strategy updates the adopted Playing Pitch Strategy (adopted in 2023) and supports the following Corporate Objectives of Harborough District Council;

- Priority 1: Community leadership to create a sense of pride in our place
- Priority 2: Promoting health and wellbeing and encouraging healthy life choices
- Priority 3: Creating a sustainable environment to protect future generations
- Priority 4: Supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy.

As part of the vision the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2031 seeks to '*shape our district to be an outstanding destination for both business and leisure*'. Key Activity KA.01.04 seeks an outcome that '*Investment in community facilities through the S106 process*'. KA.02.03 seeks to: '*Develop leisure facilities through the investment in Leisure centres & other facilities*'

The updated Strategy will ensure that investment in outdoor sports meets the priorities and demands of each sport and helps clubs and other partners to secure external funding where appropriate.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. In 2019 Harborough District Council adopted the Local Plan 2011 to 2031 for Harborough District and the 2018 Playing Pitch Strategy informed that plan. The Local Plan is now being updated and the reviewed Playing Pitch Strategy will provide up to date information and data concerning the priorities for outdoor sport in the district and help support the new Local Plan
- 1.2. The purpose of the report is to update elected members of the outcomes of the Playing Pitch Strategy review and to note that the Strategy makes recommendations for outdoor pitches and associated facilities. The Playing Pitch Strategy is based on the latest evidence provided by National Governing Bodies and consultation with clubs and other partners throughout the development of the document.
- 1.3. It should be noted that the proposals identified in the strategy are not all intended to be provided or funded directly by the District Council, and it should not be assumed that the Council will automatically make additional funds or resources available to assist other bodies to provide new or improved facilities. It also does not mean that the Council will take on responsibility for providing or managing more facilities. Delivery of the recommendations associated with the District Council or other stakeholders are subject to capacity and resources being available to realise them. Inclusion in this strategy does not guarantee delivery of all recommendations in the lifetime of the Strategy.

2. Background

- 2.1 The final Harborough Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E review was received by Harborough District Council in October 2024 after being signed off by Sport England and the National Governing Bodies for each sport covered by the Strategy.
- 2.2 The Harborough Playing Pitch Strategy review has been prepared by Harborough District Council's appointed consultant Ploszajski Lynch Consulting Ltd (PLC) over a 7-month period. The Strategy preparation has been supported by a Steering Group consisting of Officers, representatives of National Governing Bodies, Sport England and PLC.
- 2.3 The preparation of the Strategy is a technical exercise and includes gathering usage and team number information from Sports Clubs, stakeholders and other users of outdoor sports facilities The work also includes gathering information concerning demographics and projected growth areas within the district and liaising with neighbouring Local Authorities to assess their provision for sport and any cross-boundary use of facilities.
- 2.4 Proceeding to adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E Review will update the data for each sport and help the effective delivery of sport and leisure services across the

district ensuring that a network of sports facilities is in place to cater for current and future demand.

- 2.5 The Strategy will inform the new Local Plan and associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The Strategy will be used to secure developer contributions from either S106 or other planning agreements. It will also assist sports clubs and other stakeholders in planning the scope and location of new facilities. The Strategy will also be used as an evidence base when sports clubs and other partners are submitting funding bids for new or upgraded facilities.

3. Details

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024 sets out the Government's national planning policies for new development. The Framework aims to help secure the homes and jobs that the country needs while protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment. The NPPF Dec 2024 (para 104) requires local assessments to be made of sport, recreation and open space, and the preparation of key local policies for both provision and protection of facilities and spaces. Key sections from Dec 2024 NPPF include:

- Building a Strong Competitive Economy (para 88)
- Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities (paras 96 and 98)
- Sport and Leisure Facilities (para 103 and 104)
- Open Space and Recreation (paras 103 and 104).

- 3.2 The Government's sports strategy: 'Get Active - A Strategy for the Future of Sport and Physical Activity' (2023) contains three main priorities

- Driving participation and addressing inactivity
- Strengthening the integrity of sport
- Making sport more sustainable.

- 3.3 To fulfil the requirements of the current adopted Local Plan policy GI2 and the requirements of the NPPF, an up-to-date assessment of outdoor sports facilities is required. The Harborough Playing Pitch Strategy was approved by elected members for adoption in 2018, updated in 2022/23 and to ensure the data remains relevant and robust, a review has now been completed in 2024.

- 3.4 Local Plan policy GI2 (Open Space Sport and Recreation) is supported by the Playing Pitch Strategy which provides evidence for planning applications either for onsite provision of outdoor sports facilities or off-site contributions in accordance with [Sport England's Playing Pitch Calculator](#).

- 3.5 Sport England recommends that the Playing Pitch Strategy is reviewed and updated every 3 to 5 years to ensure it remains relevant. As the current Playing Pitch Strategy was adopted in 2018 and updated in 2022/23 the current review is timely.

- 3.6 The Playing Pitch Strategy review uses the approach advocated by Sport England and two different methodologies were applied:

- Sport England's 'Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance' (2013) for football, cricket, rugby and hockey pitches.
- Sport England's 'Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guidance' (2014) for tennis courts, bowling greens, netball courts and rounders pitches.

3.7 The methodology for the pitches follows the process developed by Sport England and involves five stages and ten steps as follows:

Stage A Prepare and tailor the approach (Step 1).

Stage B Gather information on the supply of and demand for provision (Steps 2 and 3).

Stage C Assess the supply and demand information and views (Steps 4, 5 and 6).

Stage D Develop the strategy (Steps 7 and 8).

Stage E Deliver the strategy and keep it robust and up to date (Steps 9 and 10).

3.8 This approach ensures the Strategy is robust and will be approved and supported by Sport England.

3.9 The Strategy review uses the same sub areas used for the preparation of the previous Strategy, these being:

- West sub area: Lutterworth, Broughton Astley and surrounds,
- Middle sub area: Market Harborough and surrounds, and
- East sub area: Kibworth, edge of Leicester and surrounds.

3.10 A key driver for the production of the Strategy is to deliver an evidence base which can continue to support the planning policies set out in the Local Plan 2011 to 2031 and the new Local Plan to 2041.

3.11 The Strategy has a number of key objectives:

- To inform the preparation of policies in the new Local Plan to 2041.
- To provide evidence to help any justification for securing S106 obligations, and/or making provision for Playing Pitch or Playing Pitch grounds as part of future development sites.
- To co-ordinate facility investment by clubs and other stakeholders in partnership with the governing bodies of sport.
- To help secure external funding for the investment and improvement of outdoor sports facilities and to prioritise investment in Harborough District Council operated sites, and other sites that provide important facilities for the community.
- To identify any deficiencies or surpluses in provision and options for dealing with them now and in the future, taking into account Local Plan housing allocations.
- To inform future decisions about the provision and funding of outdoor sports and associated facilities.

3.12 The Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E review shows that:

- All currently used pitch sites continue to require protection and therefore cannot be deemed surplus to requirements because of shortfalls now or forecast in the future.

- Community Use Agreements should be used as a matter of course to secure community use of sites.
 - Developer contributions should be sought on all major housing developments to support provision of outdoor sports.
 - Where pitches are of poor quality, these should be improved.
 - Ensure cooperation between sports to get best outcome from facilities.
 - A further 3G Artificial Turf Pitch is required within the district in the East Sub Area.
- 3.13 The full recommendations for each sport and the associated action plan are shown at Appendix B. The full Playing Pitch Strategy review report can be found at Appendix A.
- 3.14 The majority of outdoor sport in the district is provided by not-for-profit clubs run by volunteers. To achieve financial sustainability, local sports clubs will need to be supported by partners including, but not exclusively, national governing bodies, Active Together and the Council working together across a range of areas including: management, membership, funding, facilities, volunteers and partnership working, for example, with volunteer support agencies and local businesses.

4. Implications of Decisions

4.1. Corporate Priorities

4.1.1. The Playing Pitch Strategy helps support the Harborough District vision and Corporate Objectives.

Vision:

Working with our communities, we will build a future for the people of Harborough district that gives them the best life chances and opportunities through:

- Priority 1: Community leadership to create a sense of pride in our place.
 - The Strategy helps to provide excellent sports facilities that are sustainable and meet the needs of clubs in order to succeed and prosper, creating pride in the community.
- Priority 2: Promoting health and wellbeing and encouraging healthy life choices.
 - The Strategy helps to provide opportunities for participation in sport, improving health and wellbeing within the community. 67% of Harborough's population are active or fairly active (East Midlands 63.3%) and 23% of Harborough's population are inactive (East Midlands 26.7%)
- Priority 3: Creating a sustainable environment to protect future generations.

- The Strategy prioritises investment in new facilities, only providing them where required. It provides opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint of clubs by helping source investment for carbon efficient upgrades, helping to ensure that demand is balanced and reducing cross boundary travel to play.
- Priority 4: Supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy.
 - A community with good opportunities for sport is attractive to employers and employees, helping business to prosper.

4.2. Consultation

4.2.1. Information was gathered from a wide range of consultees including:

Sport England: Guidance on the assessment methodology.

Harborough District Council: Consultation with officers from Strategic Planning, Environmental Services and Community Partnerships on their respective areas of responsibility.

Neighbouring local authorities: Information on their playing pitch and outdoor sports facilities assessments and the impact of any cross-border issues was obtained from: Rugby BC, Blaby DC, Oadby and Wigston BC, Leicester City Council, Charnwood BC, Melton BC, Rutland CC, Corby BC (now part of North Northants Council), Kettering BC (now part of North Northants Council), and Daventry DC (now part of West Northants Council) councils.

Active Together: Information on local and wider strategic priorities.

Governing bodies of sport: Information on local and wider strategic priorities and local supply and demand information.

Sports clubs: Information on sports facilities provision and use, current and future needs and opinions on quality, which was submitted via an on-line survey.

Schools: Information on sports facilities provision and use, plus attitudes towards community use, which was submitted via an on-line survey.

4.2.2 The Playing Pitch Strategy report (Appendix A) contains all feedback from each of the Clubs and National Governing Bodies. Comments from Harborough District Council Officers, Active Together and Sport England have been included in the report.

4.3. Financial

4.3.1. The Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E review has cost £4.5k to prepare.

4.3.2. The Strategy states that the proposals identified in the strategy are not all intended to be provided or funded directly by the District Council, and it should not be assumed that the Council will automatically make additional funds or resources available to assist other bodies to provide new or improved facilities. It also does

not mean that the Council will take on responsibility for providing or managing more facilities. Delivery of the recommendations associated with the District Council or other stakeholders are subject to capacity and resources being available to realise them. Inclusion in this strategy does not guarantee delivery of all recommendations in the lifetime of the Strategy.

4.3.3. Sport England recommends that the Playing Pitch Strategy is reviewed and updated every 3 to 5 years to ensure the Strategy remains relevant and up to date. Officer time and financial resources will be required to support the delivery of the Strategy Actions.

4.3.4. The Playing Pitch Strategy is a long-term strategy that identifies need and makes recommendations about how this need could be met. The funding and delivery of pitch facilities is complex, and delivery will require joint working and funding to be secured from a range of partners and sources. The recommendations will also need to be reviewed regularly to reflect progress and adjusted to take into account of any changes to the priorities that occur over time.

4.3.5. Since 2018 (the lifetime of the adopted Playing Pitch Strategy and subsequent reviews) the following sums have been secured, received and allocated for outdoor sports projects across the district:

- Secured through S106 agreements (agreements signed after 1/1/2018) - **£4,720,960.00**
- S106 contributions **received** from developers since 1/1/2018 (outdoor sports only) - **£4,283,525.00**
- S106 contributions **spent** on outdoor sports projects since 1/1/2018 - **£2,609,796.00**
- Examples of contributions to projects from S106 and other funders since 1/1/2018 through identified Playing Pitch Strategy priorities –
 - Circa **£400k** Robert Smyth Academy, MH Artificial Grass Pitch project (£1m project),
 - **£260k** Football Foundation and S106 – Hall Lane Project, Lutterworth (£800k project)
 - Circa **£250k** Broughton Astley Leisure Centre and Frolesworth Road Recreation Ground projects (£2.7m S106 also contributed to Leisure Centre at BA)
 - Circa **£1.1m** Fleckney Sports Centre project
 - **£9.3k** Foxton pitch drainage
 - **£184k** Gilmorton pavilion refurbishment project
 - **£330k** Houghton Field Association Pavilion rebuild, Houghton on the Hill (additionally £230k COF grant and up to £250k from Football Foundation)
 - **£50k** Padel Tennis Courts, Market Harborough,
 - **£180k** Welland Park Academy pitch resurface,
 - Circa **£33k** Great Bowden Recreation Ground Tennis and Cricket projects
 - **£84k** MHRUFC floodlights, Market Harborough,
 - **£54k** LRUFC equipment store and changing, Lutterworth,
 - **£24k** Illston Abey CC upgrade grounds. Illston on the Hill,
 - **£21k** South Kilworth Recreation Ground, Changing improvements

- **£28k** Medbourne Sports Ground link path.

4.4. Legal

4.4.1. Whilst not a legal requirement, the Playing Pitch Strategy follows the Sport England guidelines which will help prevent legal challenge concerning planning obligations sought and secured in the light of its provisions.

4.5. Environmental Implications

4.5.1. Implementing the recommendations of the report will have a neutral impact on the Council's 2030 target of zero emissions.

4.5.2. However, the Strategy will enable clubs to improve their carbon footprint by use of low energy lighting and building improvements, so overall for the district there is likely to be a positive impact.

4.6. Risk Management

4.6.1. Adopting the Strategy will guarantee the effective delivery of outdoor sport and leisure services across the district and ensure that a network of sports facilities is in place to cater for the current and future population.

4.6.2. To not adopt the Strategy may lead to challenge by developers during negotiations for contributions included in S106 agreements. Clubs and other stakeholders may receive challenge from potential funding bodies when applying for external funding for club infrastructure and facilities.

4.7. Equalities Impact

4.7.1 The Playing Pitch Strategy has been prepared in accordance with Sport England Guidance. Sport England's strategy: 'Uniting the Movement' (2021) contains a vision for 'a nation of more equal, inclusive and connected communities. A country where people live happier, healthier and more fulfilled lives'.

4.7.2 The Playing Pitch Strategy assesses accessibility of facilities, deprivation of the communities, the aging population and the quality of facilities available to all.

4.7.3 The Playing Pitch Strategy reflects the demographic profile of the district and the demand for sports provision, established through consultation with clubs.

4.7.4 Accredited Clubs must comply with equalities requirements of their National Governing Bodies.

4.7.5 The final Playing Pitch Strategy report has been checked and formatted to be an accessible document. The accessible version of the report will be made available on the Council's website following adoption.

4.8. Data Protection

4.8.1. No issues directly arising.

5. Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1. Option 1: To not adopt the Strategy was considered to be inappropriate. This option will mean that there is an uncoordinated approach to sport provision in Harborough District. It will mean that Clubs may be less successful in achieving external funding for sport in the district as Sport England and the Sporting National Governing Bodies will not have sufficient confidence to be certain that grants are being allocated to the right location, the correct facility and sport. In the light of this far fewer grants will be offered to sporting providers across the district.

6. Recommendations

- 1. That the Panel review and comment on the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) Review before it proceeds to Cabinet and Council for adoption.**
- 2. The Panel shall discuss the following questions and any other relevant questions before providing comments to Cabinet on this report:**
 - a) Does Scrutiny Panel agree that the report has sufficient clarity, especially with regard to how the outcomes are to be delivered (para 1.2.1 of the report at Appendix A)**
 - b) Does Scrutiny Panel have any comments to make on the recommendations and actions of the report at Appendix A?**
 - c) Does Scrutiny Panel feel that there is sufficient support provided by the report at Appendix A for the preparation of the new local plan?**
 - d) Do members feel there is sufficient understanding of the interrelationship between the contents of the PPS at Appendix A and the policies of the new local plan? have any comment to make concerning the review of the PPS with regard to the preparation of the new Local Plan?**
- 3. That the Services and Communities Scrutiny Panel recommend the Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E review to Cabinet for adoption by the Council.**

e) Background papers

- 7.1 None.