

REPORT TO SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ACTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY BOARD

04 July 2019

Subject:	Sandwell Playing Pitch Strategy Refresh Needs Assessment Report and Strategic Document (October 2018)
Cabinet Portfolio:	Cllr. Maria Crompton - Leisure and Recreation
Director:	Alan Caddick – Director – Housing and Communities
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	 
Contact Officer(s):	Gemma Ryan

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board:

1. Consider whether the Council should proceed with our existing application for the Parklife Football Hubs Programme.
2. Consider alternative options for the delivery of the required number of Artificial Grass Pitches in Sandwell.
3. Recommend that the Sandwell Playing Pitch Strategy Refresh Needs Assessment Report and Strategy Document (October 2018) be presented to Cabinet for approval.
4. Consider the policy and recommendations regarding the loss of playing fields.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board regarding the Sandwell Playing Pitch Strategy refresh, and associated considerations, prior to seeking Cabinet approval.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 The implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) will help improve and maintain our sport and active leisure offer in the borough by ensuring that Sandwell is equipped with the required outdoor sport facilities for both current and future demand. This will directly support the Vision 2030 ambition 2 by providing opportunities for Sandwell's residents to live healthy lives.
- 2.2 The delivery of the PPS will improve and maintain the quantity and quality of Sandwell's outdoor sports facilities which will support ambition 8 in creating centres of community life, leisure and entertainment.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The primary purpose of a Playing Pitch Strategy is to provide a strategic needs assessment report (appendix 1) and a strategy document (appendix 2) which ensures that the provision of outdoor playing pitches meet the local needs of existing and future residents within an area.
- 3.2 A PPS Needs Assessment report informs the development and implementation of planning policy by providing evidence and context for the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 97, which states;

“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless;

- An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirement; or
- The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

- 3.3 The scope of a PPS is to carry out a Needs Assessment (Appendix 1) assessing the quality and quantity of outdoor sports facilities based upon current and projected future demand. It then makes recommendations within a supplementary Strategy Document, including Action Plan (appendix 2). This includes identifying facilities that require improvements and which existing facilities and / or additional facilities are required to meet current and future demand.
- 3.4 The following sports facilities are covered within the PPS needs assessment and strategy document;

- Football pitches
- Cricket pitches
- Rugby
- Sand based and third generation (3G) pitches
- Tennis Courts
- Bowling greens
- Netball courts
- Athletics tracks
- Golf Courses

- 3.5 The Sandwell Playing Pitch Strategy Needs Assessment Report and Strategy Document (October 2018) have been developed by external consultants, 4 Global Ltd, in line with Sport England's 'Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance' (October 2013).
- 3.6 In line with this guidance a steering group was formed including Sport England, the Council and a representative from all sports included in the scope of the PPS. It is recommended that this steering group 'sign off' the PPS before it can be finalised.
- 3.7 This version of the PPS has been developed via a refresh process as opposed to a full update. It is a refresh of the existing version 'Sandwell Playing Pitch Strategy (October 2014) (appendix 3), which was approved by the Cabinet on 16 September 2015 (Key Decision Ref. No. LVS002, Minute No. 156/15) (appendix 4: Cabinet Report and appendix 5: Cabinet Minutes).
- 3.8 The refresh approach was followed on the recommendation of Sport England primarily to ensure the Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) modelling section was up to date for the purposes of the Council's Parklife Football Hubs Application. A full update is usually conducted every 3 to 5 years, depending on the extent of changes in demand and supply over that time.
- 3.9 In January 2017 the Council submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) (appendix 6) to the Football Foundation to enter into the application process for the Parklife Football Hubs Programme. This was agreed by the Cabinet on 11 January 2017 (Key Decision Ref. No. SMBC1654, Minute No. 13/17).
- 3.10 As outlined within the Cabinet report (appendix 7) and the Cabinet Minutes (appendix 8) the Parklife Football Hubs programme committed the Council to a contribution of 40% of the overall project costs in partnership funding (circa £2,400,000 contribution from the Council).

- 3.11 The Council's EOI was successful and were invited to proceed to stage 2 of the application process, subject to carrying out an update (refresh) of the existing Playing Pitch Strategy (October 2014).
- 3.12 The refresh was primarily required to provide the evidence of need for further 3G AGP pitches in Sandwell to support the Council's application for 4 x 3G AGP's as part of the Parklife Football Hubs Programme.
- 3.13 The Parklife Football Hubs programme outlines a set of principles (appendix 9) and aims to develop hub sites for football which include at least two Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP's), natural turf (grass) provision and the required ancillary facilities.
- 3.14 The overarching aim of the Parklife Football Hubs Programme is to provide sustainable and better quality football facilities for the development of youth football.
- 3.15 The Parklife Football Hubs Programme recognises reducing budgets that local authorities have to maintain grass football pitches and the challenge for the development of the game in relation to cancellation of fixtures and poor-quality surfaces. It aims to provide facilities to move a substantial proportion of junior football from natural turf pitches to AGPs, which is a priority objective with The Football Association (The FA) Strategy (August 2015).
- 3.16 The refreshed PPS outlines that Sandwell requires four additional 3G AGPs to meet current demand. To meet future demand, it recommends that a further one will be required. Therefore, Sandwell requires five additional 3G AGPs, to meet current and future demand for football.
- 3.17 The refreshed PPS outlines that the current level of existing natural turf (grass) football pitches are required to meet current and future demand. Therefore, if any grass pitches were lost in the future there would need to be a 'like for like' replacement of provision. Section 1 of the needs assessment (appendix 1) and Section 2 of the strategy document (appendix 2) outlines Sport England's guidance and expectations for the replacement of any natural turf (grass) football pitches.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The Sandwell PPS Needs Assessment Report and Strategy Document, (October 2018) have been 'signed off ' by the PPS steering group, including Sport England.
- 4.2 Sport England recommend that the Council 'adopt' the refreshed PPS by seeking approval from the Cabinet. If the PPS is not adopted there could

be implications for future strategic planning decisions and for securing external funding to develop facilities in the future.

- 4.3 The main outcomes of the PPS identify;
 - The need for a further 5 3G AGP's in Sandwell
 - The approach required for any potential loss of playing fields
- 4.4 Following the completion and 'sign off' of the PPS the Council are now required to formally respond to the Football Foundation to indicate whether the Council are committed to proceeding to stage 2 of the Parklife Football Hubs application process. This would commit the Council to a capital contribution of circa £2,400,000 or 40% of total project costs.
- 4.5 A number of local stakeholders, including schools, have expressed an interest in taking the lead on the development of a 3G AGP. This would include obtaining external funding, providing partnership funding and managing and maintaining the facility. Proceeding with the Parklife Football Hubs Programme would prohibit external local stakeholders from securing Football Foundation or Sport England support for such projects as Parklife would absorb all of the required need for 3G AGP's (i.e. 4 x 3G pitches in total).
- 4.6 An options appraisal is currently being undertaken by Council Officers to identify an efficient and effective strategy to deliver the required number of 3G AGP's in Sandwell. This will include site feasibility and consider local need in line with the PPS. This options appraisal includes the Parklife Football Hubs programme and will also consider other options.
- 4.7 The above options appraisal will consider the option of working with local partners who have expressed an interest in developing a 3G AGP as an alternative approach to the Parklife Football Hubs Programme to achieve the quantitative gain of 3G AGP's required in Sandwell. This would significantly reduce / eliminate the capital financial commitment of the Council and allow local stakeholders to develop their own schemes. The Council may wish to consider contributions to projects on an individual basis.
- 4.8 A further options appraisal is currently being undertaken by Council Officers to identify sites that can be utilised for the future development of new natural turf pitches, if required. This is being carried out in consultation with Sport England and in line with their guidance as set out in the Exemptions in Section 1 of needs assessment report and section 2 of strategic document.
- 4.9 The above options appraisal will include a feasibility study and will identify sites in Sandwell where new natural turf pitches and associated ancillary facilities can be developed.

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

5.1 The process of developing the Sandwell Playing Pitch Strategy Needs Assessment Report and Strategy Document (October 2018) included consultation with the following stakeholders;

- Sport England
- England Netball
- England Hockey
- England Athletics
- England Golf
- ECB (England Cricket Board)
- LTA (Lawn Tennis Association)
- RFU (Rugby Football Union)
- Birmingham County F.A
- Staffordshire Cricket

5.2 Internal stakeholders that have been engaged in the process and in the development of the above options appraisals include;

- Parks and Green Spaces
- Legal services
- Planning
- Property services

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS.

6.1 To cease the Council's application for the Parklife Football Hubs Programme and seek to deliver the required number of 3G AGP's via alternative means, to be agreed.

6.2 Should the Council not 'adopt' the PPS there would be implications for external funding applications and future planning policy and protection of outdoor sports facilities.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Should the Council apply for external funding for the development of sports facilities, based upon the recommendations in the PPS, up to 40% partnership funding would be required.

7.2 In the absence of external funding, the delivery of minor facility improvements, outlined within the PPS, must be delivered within current service budgets.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Sport England are a statutory consultee in planning applications which involve developments that could result in the loss of playing fields. Therefore, the exemptions outlined with their 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance' Document which are included within the PPS must be considered when approving the loss of any playing fields in Sandwell.

9 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

9.1 The improvement and maintenance of outdoor sports facilities ensures the provision of opportunities for local people to be active.

9.2 Outdoor sports facilities provide young people with the opportunity to participate in positive activities.

10 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

10.1 The majority of sites included within the scope of the PPS are Council owned or managed, therefore the delivery of the PPS will impact upon Council land.

11 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 The Sandwell Playing Pitch Strategy Refresh Needs Assessment Report and Strategy Document (October 2018) be presented to Cabinet for approval, as recommended by Sport England.

11.2 Seek approval from the Cabinet to withdraw from the Parklife Football Hubs application process and consider alternative options for the delivery of required 3G AGP's. This will allow the Council to work with local partners to secure the partnership funding required.

12 APPENDICES:

- Appendix 1: Playing Pitch Strategy Refresh Needs Assessment (October 2018)
- Appendix 2: Playing Pitch Strategy Strategy Document (October 2018)
- Appendix 3: Playing Pitch Strategy October 2014
- Appendix 4: Report to Cabinet – Revised Playing Pitch Strategy, 16 September 2015
- Appendix 5: Minutes of Cabinet 16 September 2015

- Appendix 6: Parklife Football Hubs National Programme – Expression of Interest (EOI) Form
- Appendix 7: Parklife Cabinet Report 11 January 2017
- Appendix 8: The Cabinet Minutes 11 January 2017
- Appendix 9: Parklife Football Hubs Prospectus (2017)

Alan Caddick
Director – Housing and Communities