

<u>KEY DECISION</u> Yes
<u>DATE FIRST PUBLISHED</u> 26 July 2016

## **ST HELENS PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN**

### WARDS AFFECTED

All

### EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL ITEM

NO

#### 1. PROPOSED DECISION

That Cabinet recommend Council to:

- (1) approve the adoption by the Council of the 2016 Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan; and
- (2) endorse the Playing Pitch Assessment and Playing Pitch Strategy as supporting evidence for the preparation of the Local Plan.

#### 2. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

##### Background

- 2.1 A Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and Action Plan have been prepared by consultants KKP on behalf of the Council and its partners in order to meet the Council's corporate priority to 'encourage participation in sport, physical activity and the arts, to promote physical and mental wellbeing'. A copy of the PPS is included as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The PPS provides a strategic framework for the maintenance, improvement and provision of outdoor sports pitches and ancillary facilities between 2016 and 2026 with identification of potential development partners and sources of external funding opportunities to achieve its delivery.
- 2.3 The PPS covers the following playing pitches and outdoor sports:
  - Football pitches
  - Cricket pitches
  - Rugby league pitches
  - Rugby union pitches

- Artificial grass pitches (AGPs), which includes hockey provision
- Bowling greens
- Tennis courts

2.4 The Strategy has been informed by a comprehensive Playing Pitch Assessment Report prepared in consultation with local sports clubs and leagues to establish the supply and demand for playing pitch facilities across the Borough in terms of usage and provision. This assessment has been translated into a Strategy providing the Council with:

- A vision for the future improvement and prioritisation of playing pitches;
- A series of strategic recommendations which provide a framework for the improvement, maintenance, development and, as appropriate, rationalisation of the playing pitch stock;
- A series of sport by sport recommendations which provide a strategic framework for sport led improvements to provision; and
- A prioritised area-by-area action plan to address key issues.

The Playing Pitch Assessment has been included as Appendix 2 to this report.

#### Summary of key findings and recommendations

2.5 For the purpose of analysis the Borough was subdivided into six areas combining some wards as follows:

- Billinge & Seneley Green
- Earlestown & Newton
- Eccleston & Windle
- Haydock & Blackbrook
- Moss Bank & Town Centre
- Parr, Sutton & Bold
- Rainford
- Rainhill
- West Park & Thatto Heath

2.6 For football, shortfalls in grass pitch capacity to meet current and future demand have been identified across the Borough, mainly due to pitch quality and shortfalls for youth match sessions. The shortfall for some of these youth sessions is currently being met on adult pitches which have spare capacity. The areas identified with the greatest shortfalls are Earlestown and Newton wards (combined) and Haydock and Blackbrook wards (combined).

2.7 For rugby league, shortfalls in pitch capacity to meet currently and future demand have been identified in parts of the Borough, particularly the wards of Eccleston and Windle (combined) and West Park and Thatto Heath (combined). Poor pitch quality caused by overplay and training is the key issue limiting the playing capacity of pitches.

- 2.8 For rugby union, pitch demand is limited to certain parts of the Borough with shortfalls in current and future pitch capacity identified in the wards of Rainford, West Park and Thatto Heath (combined) and Eccleston and Windle (combined).
- 2.9 For cricket, both current and future demand can be met from existing pitch capacity across the Borough.
- 2.10 For hockey, current demand is being met although a small future shortfall has been identified.
- 2.11 It should be noted that shortfalls in pitch capacity do not necessarily translate into the need for new pitches. The supply and future demand as set out in the PPS is based on match sessions rather than actual number of pitches. The strategic recommendations made by the PPS fall into one of three categories:
- Protect - for example through protective planning policies and securing the tenure of sports clubs;
  - Enhance - for example pitch improvement measures such as drainage, adopting a tiered approach to the management of sites, partnership working on funding bids; and
  - Provide - for example remarking of pitches to increase capacity, securing long term community usage at school sites and (subject to relevant planning policy) the development of new pitches such as 'hub' sites.
- 2.12 Specific site by site recommendations are detailed in part 6 of the PPS.

#### Adoption of the PPS

- 2.13 The PPS has been developed in accordance Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance. Its preparation has been conducted by a cross departmental Steering Group of Council Officers along with representatives from the National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) and Sport England. The Strategy and its recommendations have subsequently been agreed by the Steering Group and endorsed by Sport England and the NGBs.
- 2.14 The formal adoption of the PPS by the Council marks the final step of its development stage in accordance with Sport England's Guidance. Adoption of the PPS will ensure its status is recognised across all relevant departments and will aid its delivery, giving it sufficient weight in related decisions affecting the future of playing pitches.
- 2.15 Following adoption, the Council, through the Steering Group, is responsible for the delivery of the Strategy and ensuring it is kept up to date. To guide this, A 'Monitoring and Review Process' has been prepared identifying what actions will be undertaken, by who, and when. This has been included as Appendix 3 to this report.

### 3. FACTS SUPPORTING THE PROPOSED DECISION

- 3.1 Once adopted by the Council, the Strategy will be capable of the following:

- Providing adequate planning guidance to assess development proposals affecting playing fields, as appropriate, directing open space contributions secured through development and informing and shaping local planning policy;
- Informing the protection and provision of sports facilities and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and S106 and CIL schedules;
- Informing land use decisions in respect of future use of existing outdoor sports areas and playing fields (capable of accommodating pitches) across the Borough;
- Providing a strategic framework for the provision and management of outdoor sports across the Borough;
- Supporting external funding bids and maximise support for outdoor sports facilities; and
- Providing the basis for on-going monitoring and review of the use, distribution, function, quality and accessibility of outdoor sport.

3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that: *'Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area.'* An adopted and up-to date PPS is therefore essential if the Strategy's recommendations are to be translated into Local Plan policy, giving the mechanism to support delivery and secure provision/investment where the opportunity arises.

3.3 There is a need to build key partnerships between the Council, National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), Sport England, schools, further/higher education providers, community clubs and private landowners to maintain and improve playing pitch provision. In these instances, the potential for the Council to take a strategic lead is more limited (except in terms of developer contributions). This document will provide clarity about the way forward, and allow key organisations to focus on the key issues that they can directly influence and achieve. It will be used as evidence of need for future funding bids.

#### 4. IMPLICATIONS / RELEVANCE TO MEETING SAVINGS TARGET / PLANNING FOR 2020

4.1 The PPS is considered an essential piece of evidence for the delivery of the new Local Plan, the benefits of which were set out in the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015 Local Plan Cabinet Report.

4.2 The Strategy, once adopted, would pave the way for a more coordinated and efficient approach to provision and management of sporting facilities to meet the needs of the local population.

#### 5. RISKS

##### Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

- 5.1 Planning application decisions, draft land allocations and draft planning policies are likely to be considered inadequate by Planning Inspectors if based on old information, and it will lead to increased costs to rectify at a later date.
- 5.2 A delay in the adoption of the PPS may also have detrimental implications in the securing of funding opportunities for new /improved sports facilities.

Should this Risk be added to the Corporate Risk Register?

- 5.3 No

## 6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Legal – None as a result of this decision to adopt the PPS.

Human Resources – None as a result of this decision to adopt the PPS.

Land and Property (Asset) – None as a direct result of this decision to adopt the PPS. The PPS would provide a strategic framework to inform the Council's acquisition or disposal of playing pitch sites.

Anti-Poverty – None as a result of this decision to adopt the PPS.

Effects on existing Council Policy – None as a result of this decision to adopt the PPS.

Effects on other Council Activities – None as a result of this decision to adopt the PPS.

Human Rights – None as a result of this decision to adopt the PPS.

Equalities – The PPS identifies sites with poor facilities, including disabled access and set these out as priorities to be addressed in the future. It should therefore assist in improving accessibility for all.

Asset Management – None as a direct result of this decision to adopt the PPS. The PPS would provide a strategic framework for the Council's playing pitches and can be used to inform decisions on their future use and management.

Health – The Borough's playing pitches support high levels of both sport and physical activity and as such contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing of the population.

## 7. PREVIOUS APPROVAL/CONSULTATION

Extensive consultation with local clubs, leagues, Sport England and National Governing Bodies of Sport has been undertaken to produce this strategy.

## 8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS THEREOF

None

9. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: St.Helens Playing Pitch Strategy and Actions Plan July 2016

Appendix 2: St. Helens Playing Pitch Assessment February 2016

Appendix 3: PPS Monitoring and Review Process

Appendix 4: Community Impact Assessment

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