

**REPORT to Council 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2019**  
**REPORT to Executive 9<sup>th</sup> July 2019**  
**REPORT to Place Scrutiny 25<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

**Report of: Director, Communities Health Wellbeing Sport and Leisure**

**Title: Exeter Live Better and Move More Built Facilities, Playing Fields, Pitches, Play Areas, Parks and Green Spaces Report**

**Is this a Key Decision?**

**Yes**

Yes/No

\* One that affects finances over £1m or significantly affects two or more wards. If this is a key decision then the item must be on the appropriate forward plan of key decisions.

**Is this an Executive or Council Function?**

**1. What is the report about?**

1.1 This report describes the public consultation on the draft report, proposes changes to the original proposals following feedback and recommends the next steps for the delivery of the strategies proposed within the report.

**2. Recommendations:**

**It is recommended that:**

2.1 Place Scrutiny Committee considers the revised Exeter Live Better and Move More Built Facilities, Playing Fields, Pitches, Play Areas, Parks and Open Spaces Strategy in the light of the feedback from the comprehensive public consultation process and the subsequent changes made to the original proposals.

2.2 Executive Committee considers the report and recommends that Council adopts the revised Exeter Live Better and Move More Built Facilities, Playing Fields, Pitches, Play Areas, Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.

2.3 A full consultation exercise be held with local residents and stakeholders on the future use of Northbrook Golf Course.

**3. Reasons for the recommendation:**

3.1 The draft report sets out how the Council built leisure facilities, playing fields, play areas, parks and green spaces could be developed in future so that they can contribute to the vision of Exeter becoming the most physically active city in England by encouraging those most at risk of inactivity to become active in everyday life.

3.2 An eight week consultation process has been undertaken on the draft report, which alongside the consultation on the Draft Physical Activity Strategy, attracted over 1,650 responses from residents and stakeholders. The consultation included a mixture of

methodologies to ensure a cross section of views and opinions were taken into account.

- 3.3 The draft report received high levels of support from residents as well as sporting, health and community organisations who responded to the survey, attended meetings and/or submitted responses. However there were some significant areas where responders disagreed with the Council proposals, these are summarised below.
  - 3.4 The feedback on the built facilities proposals to sell the green space at Northbrook for development to raise a capital receipt for investment in Council priorities including improved built leisure facilities, was not supported. The feedback on this issue has been very clear and the Council is not taking forward any plans to sell or build on this site. The proposal to consider a ski simulator as part of the Exeter Arena developments was not supported so is not being taken forward
  - 3.5 The feedback on priorities for Playing Pitches recognised that the earlier needs assessment requires some updating and better connecting, resulting in some changes to the priority action areas, most notably the need to commission a more recent needs assessment and to work with local stakeholders, the Football Association and Football Foundation to produce a Local Football Facility Plan. This has the potential to unlock significant investment to improve football facilities and is now included in the priority actions.
  - 3.6 Having listened to the consultation feedback in relation to Play Areas we are changing our focus on key priorities with a more fundamental shift towards further engagement with local communities to help inform future developments. We will not be closing any of the play areas without prior consultation with users (unless there is an overriding health and safety reason to do so). We are not bringing forward proposals for developing Destination Parks. New priorities in the strategy are to:
    - Establish a task group to design a strategic framework and high level priorities for the future development of play areas across the city.
    - Engage local residents and grass roots organisations in the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot areas to understand current usage and help inform future plans for local play areas within communities at highest risk of inactivity and poor health outcomes.
    - Embed active design and play principles into planning policy and guidance in respect of parks and play areas for new developments.
  - 3.7 The key message from the feedback in relation to Parks and Green Spaces is the importance of recognising the need for green spaces in the city to be protected and maintained. There was a general consensus that parks & green spaces should be accessible for all and that biodiversity is as important as accessibility. There is a need to balance physical activity, horticulture and wildlife in the development of parks and green spaces.
  - 3.8 A number of changes have now been made to the original proposals to take into account the consultation feedback and a revised set of priorities is now being proposed in the final strategy document attached to this report.
- 4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.**
- 4.1 Existing resources will be used to complete an outline Business Case for the development of the Community Sports Village proposal at Exeter Arena site and the

development of the blueprint for an Integrated Health and Wellbeing Centre in Wonford. Funding is also in place for the completion of the further development of the Playing Pitches Strategy and the production of a Local Football Facility Plan.

- 4.2 Further resources will need to be identified to engage communities in devising an alternative strategy for play areas and for the development of the parks and green spaces principles into a clear future strategy. Directors will consider, with portfolio holders current operational priorities to release appropriate staff time to undertake this work.
- 4.3 A funding strategy will need to be developed to support the proposed investments this will need to consider the issues raised in the table below:

Funding Route		Recommendations
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	The current Regulation 123 List indicates that CIL may be spent on 'public realm enhancements'. (CIL) receipts do not have to be spent in any particular locality, and there is consequently more geographical flexibility around investment decision making.	Amend the Regulation 123 List to refer more specifically to the priorities identified in this report and thereby communicate more clearly the intention to fund these through CIL.
Section 106 Agreements	S106 funding has been geographically linked to the development, resulting in more recent years in an abundance of play areas to the east of the city, but virtually no contributions to new or upgraded play areas to the west	Review options for improved S106 agreements particularly in relation to play areas and playing pitch enhancements in context of the revised Local Plan.
Rationalising provision and reducing the number of sites	Reduced burden of outdated leisure facilities and buildings alongside improving procurement and sustainability options will reduce revenue costs of maintenance in real terms.	Re-siting of leisure facilities may offer the release of assets for development and capital receipts. The funds raised may contribute to improved facilities elsewhere in line with priorities.
External funding sources-	By refocussing provision to achieve wider aims in terms of a more active and healthy lifestyle, and through partnering with community groups, stakeholders and strategic partners. There is a wealth of good practice emerging in the city with local community groups accessing significant funds through grants, trusts and other external sources.	Adopting alternative models of community ownership & management – through a future Council Community Asset Transfer model, local community groups can explore the potential of owning, managing and developing play areas themselves

- 4.4 There are a number of assumptions in relation to the high level financial strategy that underpin the recommendations and action plan these are:

- Capital funding from the sale of identified leisure sites: Clifton Hill Sports Centre and Pyramids Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre.
- Capital funding directly from residential development opportunities at specific sites is channelled directly towards new facilities at Wonford and Exeter Arena.
- Designated funding from Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to be directed at priority built facility, playing pitch, play area and parks & green spaces projects. Specific flagship programmes to be highlighted in the CIL Regulation 123 list.

- Council funding to be used to attract strategic finance from external stakeholders such as Sport England and Sport National Governing Bodies.
  - Revenue from the provision of services on the leisure sites will need to, at a minimum, generate sufficient revenue to cover the cost of any capital borrowing for the developments.
- 4.4 Further business cases will need to set out financial strategies for the capital and revenue consequences of the proposals for Council to consider in due course.

**5. Section 151 Officer comments:**

- 5.1 The report (and strategy) set out a number of aspirations for the Council going forward. The financial implications of each aspiration will be considered when the feasibility and outline business cases are presented. It is important for members to consider each of these in the context of the Council as a whole and the potential financial requirements for other services and their assets.
- 5.2 Members are reminded that certain capital expenditure has already been approved with the expectation of funding being delivered by the sale of Clifton Hill. Additionally part of the funding strategy for St Sidwells Point is reliant upon the sale of the Pyramids Leisure Centre.

**6. What are the legal aspects?**

- 6.1 There are no specific legal aspects to consider in adopting the recommended strategy.

**7. Monitoring Officer's comments:**

- 7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

**8. Report details:**

- 8.1 The Draft Built Facilities, Playing Fields, Pitches, Play Areas, Parks and Open Spaces Report establishes a clear need for the Council to set out an integrated strategy for the future these assets because:
- Delivery of sport and leisure facilities is a discretionary area for the Council however it is important that the overarching Physical Activity Strategy is underpinned by a sustainable approach that provides good quality, accessible, community based built sports and leisure facilities as well as protecting and enhancing play areas, parks and green spaces.
  - With on-going funding cuts to Councils we need to balance residents' expectations with the funding and resources available to the Council and to consult as openly as possible with the compromises and choices we have to make.
  - With the exception of the planned new build St Sidwell's Point Leisure Complex, we have an ageing and poor quality built estate. This needs a strategic approach to determine areas for future investment that will best meet the needs of residents in the context of the overall resources available to the Council.
  - We need to plan for and invest in our local facilities in the context of developments within the Greater Exeter Strategic Partnership (GESP).

- The growth in Play Areas across the city has largely been development-led as opposed to needs led, resulting in an uneven distribution and increasing unsustainable repair and maintenance costs to the Council.
  - We have statutory duties as a local planning authority in relation to playing pitches and are required to publish an assessment of current and future needs for playing fields and pitches to inform, provide evidence for and make recommendations in relation to planning policies and delivery models.
- 8.2 The draft report was launched in April 2019 and a public consultation exercise was undertaken between April 2019 and May 2019 to gather views and opinions from the public and stakeholders on the future development of the Council's:
- Built Leisure Facilities
  - Playing Fields and Pitches
  - Play Areas, and
  - Parks and Green Spaces
- 8.3 The public consultation, alongside the consultation on the Draft Physical Activity Strategy, included:
- Targeted engagement with key partners and stakeholder bodies with an interest in physical activity.
  - Online publication of the draft strategy with printed and accessible versions available from the Civic Centre.
  - Launch of an online resident & stakeholder questionnaire along with a specific [active@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:active@exeter.gov.uk) 'have you say' mailbox.
  - A face to face in-street resident survey commissioned with an independent agency.
  - Two public consultation events held in the Guildhall at which residents and stakeholders could formally provide their views, answer the survey and leave comments with council officers.
- 8.4 Alongside the consultation on the draft Physical Activity Strategy over 1,650 general responses from individuals and organisations were received.
- Over 1,000 residents took part in a representative face to face survey
  - 218 residents completed the on-line questionnaire
  - 50 stakeholders completed the on-line questionnaire
  - 90 direct responses to [active@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:active@exeter.gov.uk)
  - 300 visitors to the Guildhall

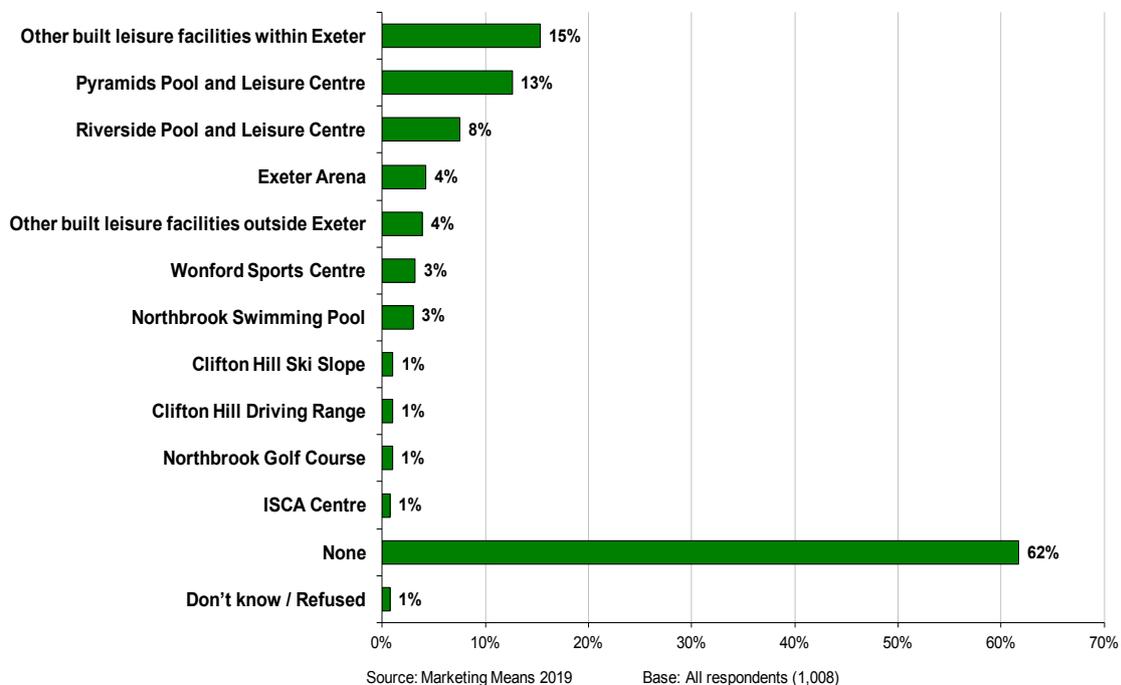
The Marketing Means on-line questionnaire and resident survey results can be seen in full in **Appendix A**.

#### 8.5 **Built Leisure Facilities**

- 8.6 Independent experts Max Associates, were commissioned to co-ordinate the consultation on the Built Leisure Facilities proposals. The Max Associates full report including the details of responses from around 50 organisations is in **Appendix B** to this report and the following is a summary of the key findings.

- 8.7 1,008 residents commented on the Built Leisure Facilities proposals through the on-line survey. Respondents were asked to identify the current facilities in a typical month that they or their family use within Exeter. Table 1 below shows the responses received.
- 8.8 62% of resident respondents stated that they didn't use any built leisure facilities in or outside of Exeter and 1% didn't answer the question. 15% of responders said they used built facilities within Exeter not provided by the Council and 4% said they used other built leisure facilities outside of Exeter. 1% of responders said they used facilities provided privately at Clifton Hill Driving Range and Clifton Hill Ski Slope.
- 8.9 The Pyramids Swimming Pool and Leisure Centre is the Council facility most used by responders (13%) followed by the Riverside Pool and Leisure Centre (8%); Exeter Arena (4%); Wonford Sports Centre (3%), Northbrook Swimming Pool (3%) with ISCA Centre and the Northbrook Pitch and Putt least used by responders (1%).

**Table 1: Current Use of Built Facilities in Exeter**

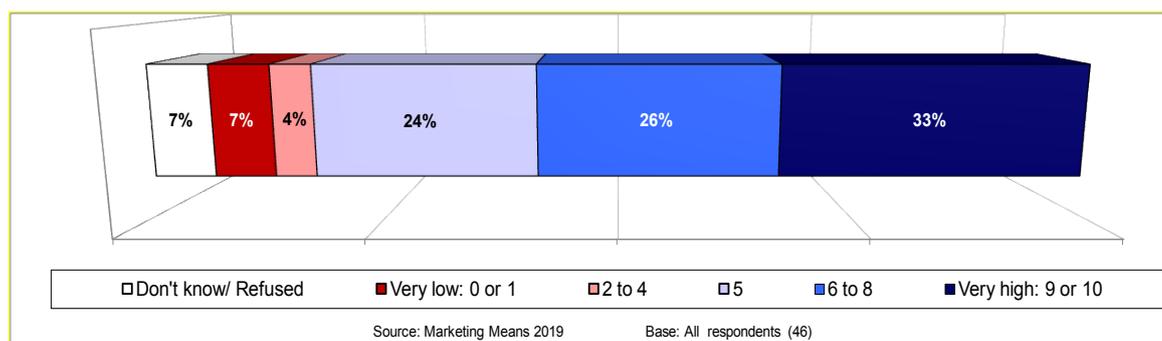


- 8.10 Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with three key statements:

Statement	Response
<i>The aims and approach recommended are fair and reasonable</i>	87% (59% very good and 29% good) considered the aims and approach recommended as fair and reasonable.
<i>These are the right priorities for Exeter</i>	82% (54% very good and 28% good) considered these are the right priorities for Exeter
<i>Overall, I support these proposals</i>	85% (60% very good and 25% good) considered that overall they could support the proposals.

- 8.11 90 people sent emails to the 'have your say' inbox. 60% were from residents concerned about the potential loss of the open green space at the Northbrook Golf Course site. A small number of residents stated their concern was the potential loss of the golf provision on the site, but many more said they could accept the loss of the golf but not the open green space.
- 8.12 The resident survey shows support for the Council's aims, priorities and proposals in relation to the Built Leisure Facilities but there is also a genuine concern about the potential loss of the Northbrook site as an open green space.
- 8.13 50 organisations or groups responded to the online survey. However, only 46 actually completed the questionnaire. 59% (33% very highly and 26% highly) said they were highly likely or very likely to commit to the proposals. 11% responded with low ratings and would be unlikely to commit to the proposals for built facilities. 24% rated the question neither high nor low. It could be said that this 24% have an open mind about the Council's proposals.

**Table 11. How likely would you and your organisation be to commit to the proposals for Built Facilities for Sports and Leisure in the city?**



- 8.14 The following themes have been identified from the feedback from the 50 organisations/groups from the survey, emails and face to face meetings:
- There is a clear need for Exeter City Council to listen to stakeholders concerns.
  - The majority (59%) said they were highly likely or very likely to commit to the proposals.
  - The majority have said they support the future plans and others have stated they would like to be consulted with, and work in collaboration with, the Council on developing the plans.
  - A desire to see further investment in the Council's built leisure facilities.
  - An understanding of the need for a range of flexible multi-use facilities.
  - Consideration for enhanced cycling provision, including potential consideration for Exeter Arena to be a strategic cycling hub.
  - On-going community engagement and co-design in the development of the proposals for Wonford.
  - General continued consultation and communication on the future developments for the built facilities.

- Promotion of active travel to leisure facilities through improved accessibility walking & cycling infrastructure.
  - Recognition of the role of the quayside and canal as a destination and resource to promote physical activity.
  - Desire for investment in water sports.
  - General opposition to the selling of Northbrook Golf Course site for development.
  - No appetite for a virtual ski simulator within the city.
- 8.15 The final strategy sets out a revised set of priority actions based on the consultation feedback.
- 8.16 Playing Fields and Pitches**
- 8.17 During the consultation period council officers engaged with Sport England and key National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and local stakeholders on the priority actions being proposed for playing pitches. NGBs highlighted that there has not been a significant shift in the playing pitch data or the priorities presented in the draft report however there was some concern that the future forecasts were out of date and a refresh is recommended.
- 8.18 Feedback received from Devon FA (football), RFU (rugby), DCB (cricket) and England Hockey is now being compiled to Sport England PPS methodology and will provide an updated evidence base against current and future population projections in Exeter. This will identify the current shortfall in playing pitches across the city, both grass and artificial grass pitch requirements
- 8.19 The priority actions have been revised to focus on setting up a formal steering group to review the updated needs assessment and prepare a strategy with priority playing pitch development projects from autumn 2019 onwards
- 8.20 We have incorporated a new priority: alongside the development of the Playing Pitch Strategy, to work with the FA and Football Foundation to produce a Local Football Facility Plan with the potential to unlock significant investment to improve football facilities.
- 8.21 In addition to the above other themes have been identified during the consultation period which will be explored by the steering group:
- There is a shortage of both grass and artificial grass pitches in Exeter to meet the needs of current demand and expanding population growth.
  - The need to work with neighbouring councils, particularly in regard to sports where there is significant boundary crossover.
  - There is significant potential to improve community access on education sites and further work should be done to unlock this capacity.
  - Local stakeholders are interested in exploring alternative community management models or community asset transfer for specific sites.
  - Detailed playing pitch needs assessment should be undertaken as part of wider master planning of the Exeter Arena and Wonford sites.
  - There is a need to develop more detailed feasibility of playing field sites with more than 3 pitches and multiple changing room/pavilion buildings.

- We have not included Bowls or Tennis in our PPS or Built Facilities report, yet we have a significant stock on our sites and well established community & club provision.

8.22 The final strategy sets out a revised set of priority actions based on this consultation feedback.

### 8.23 Play Areas

8.24 999 residents commented on the Play Area proposals through the on-line survey. Alongside commenting on proposals residents were asked how often they use council play areas and how they travel to access them. The full details are in **Appendix A** but specific headlines for play areas include:

- 37% of residents use play areas at least once a month, with 8% using them on a daily basis.
- 67% of young families (with children aged 0-10) use play areas at least once a week.
- 90% residents walk to their local play area.
- 67% travel less than 10 minutes to get to their local play area.
- Generally residents are willing to travel up to 15 minutes to their local play area.
- 95% residents would like the Council to continue to provide free, inclusive, well equipped play areas.

This shows the high value people in Exeter place on local play areas and the ability to be able to walk to their local play area.

8.25 RedQuadrant were commissioned to co-ordinate listening exercises on the Play Area proposals: a full report including the details of responses from residents is in **Appendix C**.

8.26 Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with some key statements

Statement	Response
<i>The aims and approach recommended are fair and reasonable</i>	86% (59% very high and 27% high) considered the aims and approach recommended as fair and reasonable.
<i>These are the right priorities for Exeter</i>	80% (55% very high and 25% high) considered these are the right priorities for Exeter
<i>Overall, I support these proposals</i>	83% (60% very high and 25% high) considered that overall they could support the proposals.

Statement	Response
<i>The City Council should continue to provide free, inclusive, well equipped play and recreational areas for all ages</i>	95% (88% very high and 7% high) of residents agreed with this proposal
<i>In certain smaller play areas, old and unsafe play equipment should not be replaced in order to allow other larger play areas to be improved</i>	33% (55% very high and 25% high) of residents agreed with this proposal

<p><i>Increasing the number of Strategic Parks and creating new Destination Play Parks will enhance play area provision for everyone</i></p>	<p>83% (60% very good and 25% good) considered that overall they could support the proposals.</p>
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8.27 In addition over 90 people sent emails to the 'have your say' inbox:

- 10% were from residents concerned about the potential closure of their local play area.
- A petition with 101 signatures was received on behalf of local residents campaigning to continue the maintenance and equipment replacement for Fleming Way and Gras Lawn play areas.
- Over 50 residents provided comments as part of open public listening events in Whipton (Exeter Arena) and St Thomas (Pleasure Ground).

8.28 Bringing together the feedback from multiple sources it is clear that residents overwhelmingly support the Council continuing to provide well equipped, inclusive play provision. People also told us that:

- There is general opposition to closing or not renewing equipment in smaller play areas.
- Local community organisations and residents would like further engagement on the future of their local play area and are willing to work in partnership with the Council to improve provision.
- Communities are interested in playing a greater role in the future management of their local play area, for example: exploring asset transfer, volunteering and fundraising.
- Respondents to the survey supported the approach to invest in Strategic Play Areas and new Destination Parks.
- The listening exercise and responses to the 'have your say' inbox showed some concern for Destination Parks citing further travelling distances and impact on local play areas.

8.29 It is clear from the feedback that further work is required to understand the amount and type of usage of local play areas and there is a need for continued consultation and communication on the future developments for play areas.

8.30 Having listened to the consultation feedback in relation to Play Areas we are changing our focus on key priorities with a more fundamental shift towards further engagement with local communities to help inform future developments. We will not be closing any of the play areas without prior consultation with users (unless there is an overriding health and safety reason to do so. We are not bringing forward proposals for developing Destination Parks. New priorities in the strategy are to:

- Establish a task group to design a strategic framework and high level priorities for the future development of play areas across the city.
- Engage local residents and grass roots organisations in the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot areas to understand current usage and help inform future plans for local play areas within communities at highest risk of inactivity and poor health outcomes.
- Embed active design and play principles into planning policy and guidance in respect of parks and play areas for new developments.

### 8.31 Parks and Green Spaces

8.32 RedQuadrant were commissioned to host two parks & green spaces focus groups with key local stakeholders and their full report is in **Appendix D**.

8.33 The purpose of the focus groups was to review the priorities in the draft strategy and to set out some principles and a potential approach for future engagement with residents and communities. 25 representatives of local community organisations attended the sessions. The focus groups identified some key emerging strategic priorities:

- Commit to maintaining and protecting green spaces in the city.
- Develop a clear policy on Community Asset Transfer.
- Align with Exeter's health and wellbeing strategies.
- Make biodiversity a key theme.
- Commit to making parks and green spaces accessible to all.

8.34 Key themes that have been identified include:

- An obvious passion for Exeter's parks and green spaces and a clear determination from local organisations to retain and develop them.
- Understanding of the need to do things differently in the context of the Councils budgetary pressures.
- Commitment and willingness to support the council with current maintenance and future development of parks.
- Communication could be improved and ongoing engagement with residents and communities would bring greater benefit.
- Strong wish to involve young people in engagement and future development
- The need to strike a clear balance between physical activity, horticulture and wildlife.
- Strong agreement to see less grass cutting and more wild spaces.
- Need to improve positive signage and accessibility for parks & green spaces.
- Community Builders (as party of the Wellbeing Exeter programme) have an important role to play in engaging communities with their local green space.

8.35 The revised strategy takes into account this feedback.

### 8.36 Next Steps

- 8.37 Following adoption of the revised strategy the key milestones for delivery are set out in the table below.

Area	Timeframe
Exeter Arena Community Sports Village including new Community Swimming Pool	Outline Business case November 2019
Wonford Integrated Community Health and Wellbeing Centre	Blueprint and site master plan December 2019
Community Asset Transfer Policy	Draft for Consultation October 2019
Playing Pitch Strategy and Artificial Grass Pitches' Investment Plan	Strategy and Report October 2019
Local Football Facility Plan and investment Priorities Report	Strategy and Report October 2019
Play Area Strategic Framework	Draft for Consultation 2020
Parks and Green Spaces Strategy	Draft for Consultation 2020

### 9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

- 9.1 The Strategy will contribute to the Corporate Plan objectives of tackling congestion and accessibility; promoting active and healthy lifestyles and building great neighbourhoods.

### 10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

- 10.1 The risks to the successful implementation of the Strategy include lack of stakeholder engagement and the investment required to deliver on the strategy. Significant investment in built facilities is already in place from the Council and additional investment is anticipated for community developments through the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot. The partnership approach implicit in the Pilot may identify other funding opportunities and priorities in order to deliver the goals of the Pilot. These risks will be monitored as the plan develops, and steps taken to mitigate as appropriate.
- 10.2 Individual business cases will be brought forward for further consideration in due course.

### 11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

- 11.1 There is no specific identified negative impact on people with protected characteristics as set out in the Disability ACT (2010) created as a result of this strategy. Therefore an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required. However physical activity and sport participation levels for some groups with protected characteristics can be lower than in other groups of the population. Therefore operational delivery plans connected to this strategy will assess and take into account impacts for those particular groups. The intended re-procurement of the leisure operator contract during 2019/20 will be particularly relevant in this context.

11.2 It is worth noting that areas with high levels of physical inactivity are more deprived. There are higher incidences amongst deprived populations of the types of conditions / diseases caused by inactivity. There are some pockets in the city where deprivation levels are amongst the top 20% of deprived areas in the Country. The Physical Activity strategy identifies these are priority areas for community development programmes and they will be a focus for the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot. Both the Exeter Area and the Wonford site proposed for development are located within some of these designated areas in the city.

## **12. Are there any other options?**

12.1 The proposals in the draft strategy have been widely endorsed through the consultation process with changes made following consultation feedback so no alternative options are being considered.

### **Director**

Jo Yelland

### **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

**Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

None

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