

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 1st November 2022

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 13th December 2022

Report of: The Director of Culture, Leisure and Tourism

Title: Exeter Playing Pitch Strategy

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

The Exeter Playing Pitch Strategy assesses current and future demand for formal sports pitches in Exeter. The Strategy provides a framework for resource prioritisation and informed planning decisions. It is a living document that will be reviewed on an annual basis to keep pace with the changing sports landscape in Exeter. This report seeks approval for that strategy.

2. Recommendations:

That Executive recommends and Council approve:-

2.1 The Exeter Playing Pitch Strategy; and

2.2 the strategy is implemented, subject to financial constraints.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

The Exeter Playing Pitch strategy will support the local planning system, the principles will help enable and support healthy lifestyles, deliver community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs, and give everyone the chance to get active.

The rationale of the Exeter PPS is to:

1. Recognise and give significant weight to the benefits of sport and physical activity.

2. Undertake, maintain and apply robust and up-to-date assessments of need and strategies for sport and physical activity provision, and base policies, decisions and guidance upon them.

3. Plan, design and maintain buildings, developments, facilities, land and environments that enable people to lead active lifestyles.

4. Prioritise sites for investment to protect, enhance and provide new sports pitches for local communities

5. Provide a clear strategy for external partners to engage with and work alongside Exeter City Council to deliver playing pitch improvements

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources

A number of sites within Exeter have been highlighted for improvements and the investment is subject to S106 contributions, CIL funding and external sources.

Officer capacity will be required through existing resources within the Active & Healthy People team and Parks and Open Spaces team to establish a local steering group to implement the key priorities in the Exeter Playing Pitch Strategy.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

The report sets out a plan to deliver any improvements by external funding or CIL / S106 contributions. It is essential that Members are mindful of this in the current financial climate.

6. What are the legal aspects?

None identified

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

The content of this report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 The Exeter Playing Pitch Strategy assesses current and future demand for formal sports pitches in Exeter. The Strategy considers the demand for these sports now, over the next 3-5 years (considered the practical lifetime of the Strategy) and over the longer term to 2040 (to align with the new Local Plan). For the purposes of team generation rates, the population increase to 2028 and 2040 includes growth through new housing. The Strategy provides a framework for resource prioritisation and informed planning decisions. It is a living document that will be reviewed on an annual basis to keep pace with the changing sports landscape in Exeter. The full draft strategy and proposed action plan can be found at Appendix A

8.2 The Strategy has been researched in conjunction with consultants BELAP and developed through consultation with Sport England, the pitch sport National Governing Bodies, sports clubs, league associations, schools, colleges and community organisations. It has been informed through a review of Exeter's sports pitches and ancillary facilities.

8.3 The Strategy is set in the context of the Council's community strategy and corporate plan and has close links with the Live and Move physical activity strategy and Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. It recognises the important contribution made by sport in the local economy and in delivering corporate objectives.

8.4 The key objectives of the strategy are:

Objective 1 PROTECT, ENHANCE, PROVIDE: To protect existing provision and proactively plan for and provide sufficient and appropriate high quality facilities and opportunities (enhanced and new) to meet demand to 2040, wherever possible making the best use of facilities already available.

Objective 2 TO ESTABLISH A STRATEGIC DELIVERY FRAMEWORK: To develop, maintain and value strategic partnerships within the city and from neighbouring authorities and to involve all stakeholders and managing and operating agencies in a framework which enables the sharing of skills, expertise and resources to deliver the PPS.

Objective 3 TO DEVELOP A NETWORK OF COMMUNITY SPORTS HUBS: To place new and enhanced playing field facilities at the heart of a network of community sports hubs, in order to encourage participation in the pitch sports and other outdoor activities and to facilitate community involvement, management and use.

Objective 4 TO SUPPORT AND DEVELOP THE COMMUNITY USE OF EDUCATION FACILITIES: To recognise the value of educational investment in Exeter into pitches and sport in supporting community and city aspirations for a healthier city and to consolidate their offer and support them in enhancing their facilities and developing further community use and involvement.

Objective 5 TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO BECOME MORE ACTIVE BY PARTICIPATING IN SPORT: To provide a diverse range of outdoor sports facilities and opportunities to assist in encouraging and attracting people from all groups within the community, including those still underrepresented in sport to become more active, to the benefit of their health and wellbeing.

Objective 6 TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE, HIGH QUALITY MAINTENANCE OF GRASS PITCH SITES: To provide sufficient resources for the adequate and appropriate maintenance of grass pitch sites and their improvement where identified, and to manage and maintain these facilities in such a way as to address issues around environmental sustainability and the effect on climate.

8.5 The strategy focuses on the main outdoor pitch/court sports of cricket, football, hockey, rugby union and tennis whilst including other formal sports pitches where there is demand in Exeter, for example Baseball. It covers all pitches in Exeter not just those owned by the council, other significant pitch provides in the city include Exeter College, University of Exeter and all schools within the city boundary.

8.6 COMMUNITY SPORTS HUBS - This will be a priority focus of the Delivery Group in implementing the Strategy. For the Exeter PPS, a 'Community Sports Hub' is defined as 'an area or site with a range of sports facilities where local sports clubs and other stakeholder and management organisations connect and work together to inspire, create and improve the opportunities for the local community to become more active through taking part in sport'. A good practice example is the existing Exwick Community Sports

Hub – covering the Exwick and Flowerpot Playing Fields and the Exwick Sports Hub (artificial grass pitch and tennis courts), on land owned by the City Council and leased to Exeter College

8.7 This Strategy wishes to give high priority to working with other key partners and stakeholders to deliver similar hubs at other sites across the city. These sites have been identified as potential community sports hubs on the basis of several of the following:

- The sites comprise more than one type of facility and cater for several sports and/or casual and informal recreational activities (not just the pitch sports)
- A variety of owners, key stakeholders and local clubs and groups are involved in their ownership, management and use
- This PPS has identified that facilities at these sites would benefit from enhancement and additional investment
- They meet identified local needs and may also serve defined areas of deprivation
- They have the potential for development and expansion to include additional sports and activities and community uses to meet shortfalls identified in this PPS
- They are already the focus of other City Council initiatives and are well placed to be delivered in the short term

8.8 A preliminary list of Community Sports Hubs has been proposed, for further discussion through the delivery steering group:

- King George V Playing Fields
- St Luke's School/ Whipton/Monkerton/Pinhoe
- Exeter Arena/Exhibition Fields/St James School
- Topsham
- Wonford
- Cowick Barton/West Exe/St Thomas
- Hamlin Lane Playing Fields
- Heavitree Pleasure Ground

8.9 The Exeter PPS has been undertaken in full accordance with the Guidance as set out by Sport England in its 'Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance' (2013; currently being updated). This has five distinct stages with elements of consultation built into each and is specifically designed to comprehensively include the views, knowledge and expertise of all people involved in the field of planning, managing, developing, operating and using playing pitch facilities in Exeter. In the first Stage (Stage A) a Steering Group was set up comprising representatives of relevant Exeter City Council departments, all national governing bodies of the pitch sports and tennis, education agencies in the city, Sport England, Active Devon and adjoining local authorities. This Steering Group has reviewed, discussed, amended and 'signed off' each Stage of the PPS preparation.

8.10 During the information gathering process at Stage B, a wide consultation took place (either by email or on the phone or in person) about the operation and use of their playing pitch facilities and, critically, their aspirations for the future:

- all pitch sports and tennis clubs and
- organisations such as leagues, community sports trusts etc;

- maintenance, management and operational personnel responsible for playing pitches and tennis courts,
- all education sites (HE and FE, all private and state secondary and primary schools).

8.11 Overall, over a 95% response rate was achieved (some primary schools without playing pitch facilities did not reply). All information gathered was entered in a database and informed the Assessment of Need at Stage C. The analytical techniques used are very specific to each sport, and further detail was often sought. The production of the Strategy and Action Plan itself at Stage D was also undertaken in partnership with the Steering Group, members of which went back and consulted with individual clubs and users and pitch site operators when and if required.

8.12 Through consultation with the community of people and organisations who are involved in any capacity with playing pitch and tennis court provision in Exeter and the involvement of the Steering Group (members of which have close links with local clubs, schools, community groups that use sports pitches and tennis courts), has ensured that due regard has been paid to the widest possible canvas of relevant points and issues and has enabled a Strategy to be formulated which sets the broad agenda for improvement going forward.

8.13 An opportunity for wider consultation is built into the Strategy process through the delivery and implementation stage. At Stage E of the Strategy is designed to 'Deliver the strategy and keep it robust and up to date' through delivery of an action plan and in wider consultation with communities. The Strategy Action Plan sets out various Options for each site under the Heading 'DRAFT OPTIONS AND ACTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (STAGE D/E)'. The Exeter PPS Delivery Group (developed from the Steering Group) will discuss the Options and Actions for each site and propose a way forward. Where these involve developments and improvements to a site, or the introduction of new sites, consultation (in line with the ECC Consultation Charter) will be undertaken with residents, communities, local users and interested parties, to ensure that these proposals only move forward after all factors have been fully considered.

8.14 Following formal approval of the strategy, an Exeter PPS delivery steering group will be established and convened to support the delivery and implementation of the proposed action plan.

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

The decision to approve and the Exeter Playing Pitch Strategy programme directly impacts key council corporate strategic priorities:

- Building Great neighbourhoods
- Promoting active and healthy lifestyles
- Net Zero ambition

The focus of the strategy and is to protect, improve and enhance playing pitch provision across the city to enable residents and communities to lead health, inclusive and active lives.

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

There is a risk that without an adopted strategy the council would not be able to collect developer contributions (S106).

There is a risk that without an adopted strategy Sport England and the Sports Governing bodies will not consider applications for external funding from the council or from any sports club in Exeter.

The Playing Pitch Strategy provides an important evidence base to support relevant policies within the future Exeter Local Plan. These policies are used in planning decisions and therefore it is important that they are underpinned by an up to date assessment of need.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equalities Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 The strategy and associated action plan delivery will have the potential to deliver direct impact on our carbon reduction target (carbon neutral by 2030). There are a number of issues to explore through the implementation phase of any playing pitch improvements:

- **Major developments** - When planning for major new developments and links to sports pitches and facilities, planning officers should be considering the principles established by Sport England / Public Health England's Active Design Guidance.
- **Sustainable locations** - to ensure that playing pitches lie at the heart of their local communities and are easily accessible to all, thus reducing the need to travel by car,

or work is progressed to help ensure that sustainable transport connectivity is strong to pitch sites

- **Good design** - incorporating low carbon and carbon-reducing measures and innovations such as sustainable drainage systems, rainwater recycling, electric car and bike charging points, biomass boilers, the greater use of natural light / passivhaus design and underfloor heating in sports pavilions, solar power for electricity generation should be considered wherever feasible.
- **Innovation** - Alternatives to grass and other technical developments could be considered in the future: hybrid pitches (a combination of grass and artificial grass) are being trialed in a few locations in the UK and may come forward as a sustainable alternative to full artificial grass provision, which face major challenges now in terms of manufacture, disposal of carpets, reduction of loss of rubber crumb to watercourses (from 3G pitches) and their lifetime cost.
- **Supporting the surrounding environment** - Opportunities can be taken on multi-pitch / multi-use strategic sites, in particular, to invest in whole life and whole site plans which benefit on-site and adjacent ecology and habitats (for example, testing whether net gains in biodiversity can be achieved).

13. Are there any other options?

The council could not adopt a Playing Pitch Strategy. This would make it difficult for the council to seek developer contributions and for local community clubs to seek investment and support from external agencies, Sport England and National Governing Bodies of Sport. The council would not have a formal evidence base for decision making regarding the future of playing pitches and specific site protection and enhancement.

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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