

Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading

Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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To: SCRUTINY

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To: CABINET

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Adoption of the Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy

Recommendation(s)

- (a) To review and adopt the South Oxfordshire Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy
- (b) To review and adopt the South Oxfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	Yes	No	No	No
Signing off officer	Simon Hewings	Pat Connell	Kim Hall	Lorne Grove

Purpose of report

1. To introduce the process and work undertaken to develop the South Oxfordshire Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy (LFAS) and Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS).
2. For Cabinet to adopt the LFAS and PPS for South Oxfordshire.

Corporate objectives

3. The adoption of the Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy contributes to the following South Oxfordshire Corporate Plan 2020-2024 themes:
 - Improved economic and community well-being
 - Action on Climate Emergency
 - Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability
4. This is primarily by making people's lives healthier through providing opportunities to be physically active. Improving and providing local facilities near to where people work/live and encouraging the switch to more active travel will contribute to climate as well as community objectives.

Background

5. Alongside Vale of White Horse District Council, Stuart Todd Associates were commissioned to prepare a LFAS (Appendix 1) and PPS (Appendix 2 and 3) for each district. The studies have been a joint commission between both councils but have created separate studies for each council area. Both studies for each council have an aligned strategy for the Didcot area given that the town and its hinterland stretch across the district boundaries.
6. The LFAS identifies the high level, strategic need to protect and enhance existing facilities, or the need to provide new facilities including swimming pools, sports halls, activity halls, village halls, community centres, dance and fitness studios, health and fitness suites (gyms), squash courts, gymnastic facilities, archery ranges, tennis courts, netball courts, cycling facilities, athletics facilities, bowls facilities, croquet lawns, water sports facilities, skateparks, multi-use gaming areas (MUGAs), parkour facilities, climbing walls, horse-riding centres, and golf courses.
7. The PPS identifies the high level, strategic need to protect and enhance existing sports pitches, or the need to provide new pitches – both artificial and grass. The strategy focusses on football, rugby union, cricket and hockey. Our consultants STA also considered the impact of lesser played sports as well in preparing the strategy.
8. The strategies are a high level snapshot in time of the key sports and leisure needs of the district. They provide the council with the strategic framework to direct funds for enhancing existing or building new facilities in our district. The strategies do not

provide a precise blueprint for change or provide an acceptance that it will undertake every action within it. Instead, they set out the ambition and a “direction of travel” with a number of detailed actions, recommendations and options for facilities and pitches which will need to be planned for, delivered, monitored and their impact on demand managed during the strategy period. The strategy cannot do the work necessary (for example, logistical, feasibility and viability work) required to confirm actions with 100% certainty and make things happen “on the ground”, which is the task of the many stakeholders (such as clubs, providers, owners and managers of pitches) and bodies (such as the council, sports governing bodies and Sport England) which may be responsible for delivery of pitches and facilities following the strategy’s adoption.

9. The strategies form a key part of the evidence in the emerging Joint Local Plan (JLP), by identifying the leisure and playing pitch infrastructure that large scale residential-led developments will need to provide. The council will use the recommendations for these housing sites as the starting point for negotiating section 106 agreements. These are legal agreements signed between the council and the developer to ensure they deliver, or financially contribute to, the infrastructure needed to mitigate the impact of their development.
10. STA have prepared the LFAS and PPS studies in accordance with guidance from Sport England and agreed their approach with the national governing bodies (NGBs) for each sport / activity. They completed an audit of our existing sports and leisure facilities between December 2022 and January 2023, contacting sports clubs and facility / pitch operators as part of this process, as well as undertaking site visits. Following this, they used population forecast data (aligned with the proposed housing growth in the proposed submission Joint Local Plan) and assumed take up rates of sports / activities from this population, to identify the need over the local plan period.
11. From this information, the strategies identify how to meet this need through one of three recommendations: (1) protecting our existing facilities and pitches that are addressing the needs, (2) enhancing our existing facilities and pitches to allow them to play a larger role in meeting the needs, and (3) providing new facilities or pitches to meet the needs. Section 4 of the LFAS and PPS identifies the methodology that the strategies followed.
12. We have worked with STA to ensure that key stakeholders have been involved in the preparation of the strategy. STA reported to a technical steering group of stakeholders, including local, regional and national sports bodies, the Council and Sport England who fed back detailed technical information and provided direction to the strategies.
13. The Joint Local Plan member steering group has also reviewed various iterations of the LFAS and PPS, and provided input into the documents as they have evolved.
14. Between 13 March and 24 April 2024 we also held a wider public consultation on the proposed draft strategies. 147 comments were received on the draft strategies, with 31% of responders being users of a sport club, and 23% not being members of a sport club. The remaining respondents were a mix of organisations (such as developers, parish councils, or sports clubs themselves). A detailed consultation report that explains responses to received comments is included at appendix 4.
15. Following the public consultation, officers worked with STA and briefed cabinet members for planning policy and leisure, to amend the strategies in the following ways.

16. Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy:

- i. Holton Playing Fields – provided clarity on the former tennis courts and the proposed skatepark.
- ii. Chinnor - added a recommendation for a new skate park in Chinnor.
- iii. Bull Croft Park, Wallingford - removed the recommendation for skate park specifically at Bull Croft Park in Wallingford.
- iv. Sonning Common - added a recommendation for a new MUGA and short-mat bowls club for Sonning Common.
- v. Riverside Park, Wallingford - updated references to accessible boat club facilities at Riverside Park in Wallingford
- vi. Added emphasis on new dedicated gymnastics provision in the South and West sub areas.

17. Playing Pitch Strategy:

All sports:

- i. Added additional emphasis into the recommendations that the needs of people with disabilities and safety issues (particularly regarding women and girls) are addressed through good design and improvements.
- ii. Climate change – added the need for proposals to fully consider climate change impacts and mitigation against them.

Cricket:

- iii. Included a clarifying statement regarding hybrid pitches, which are currently not endorsed by the English Cricket Board (ECB) ECB as in pilot phase. This likely to change in the strategy's lifetime.
- iv. Indoor cricket - assessed and included in the LFAS.
- v. Marsh Baldon and Stoke Row – included recommendations for the pavilion project.
- vi. Watlington – the strategies now reflect the ambition for an additional cricket pitch where demand can be evidenced on the ground.

Football:

- vii. Oxford Brookes Campus, Wheatley – Amended the reference for potential mini football pitches in outfield on the cricket ground site.
- viii. Southern Road, Thame – amended recommendation to suggest site could be considered for additional pitches subject to demand.
- ix. Watlington – added recommendation to support ambitions for additional pitches, subject to demand.
- x. Chalgrove – amended the quality to recognise the club's assessment that pitches are poor quality, and the need to improve them.
- xi. Cholsey - updated quality of pitch to recognise club's assessment that pitches are poor quality, and desire to improve the changing facilities.

Hockey:

- xii. Thame – added emphasis on any replacement Artificial Grass Pitch surface (Lord Williams) being sand-based.

Residential led development site recommendations

- xiii. Included additional caveats around strategic site contributions.

- 18. The final recommendations of the report for each sub area in the district are extensive and are set out in pages 40 to 54 of the LFAS and 33 to 75 of the PPS.
- 19. Subject to Cabinet deciding to adopt the strategies, the council will continue to work closely with the technical steering group (made up of council officers, Sport England and national governing bodies) to progress with Stage E (the delivery element of the Sport England guidance) to monitor, evaluate and review progress of the action plan. In parallel, the council will also work with sports clubs, parish and town councils and other relevant groups to support the delivery of the recommendations.

Options

- 20. The recommended option is to adopt both the PPS and LFAS for South Oxfordshire. This will provide updated strategies, based on new primary research and public engagement, to replace the older strategies from 2015 and 2014 respectively. This will bring several benefits including a robust evidence base to help protect and enhance existing pitches and facilities and to provide new facilities. The strategies can support the planning of new developments to provide new facilities or off-site contributions. The strategies can support clubs, teams and facility providers with funding applications. They can also defend against inappropriate development or loss of pitches and leisure facilities. The strategies form an important part of evidence and actions which can contribute towards improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those who live and work in the district.
- 21. Another option is to adopt only the PPS. This will reduce the benefits because the council will not have up to date data to assist with planning applications and support the provision of new leisure facilities and contributions. It will also be challenging to support with S106 and CIL funding applications for leisure providers and sports groups. Without an adopted LFAS it will be harder to negotiate S106 contributions based on current needs, and more challenging to support requests for external funding or CIL spend on leisure, sports and community facilities.
- 22. Another option is to adopt only the LFAS. This will reduce the benefits because the council will not have up to date data to assist with planning applications and support the provision of new playing pitches, ancillary facilities and off-site contributions. Without an adopted PPS it will be harder to negotiate S106 contributions based on current needs, and more challenging to support requests for external funding or CIL spend on playing pitches.
- 23. A further option is not to adopt either strategy. This would mean delay and uncertainty over this part of the evidence base for the Joint Local Plan. The Council would not benefit from the investment made in commissioning the studies and creating new strategies with public engagement. It could cause confusion to the public and mean a

loss of opportunity to secure appropriate developer contributions for playing pitches or leisure facilities in the absence of up to date strategies.

Financial Implications

24. The strategies identify the need for improvements and new facilities but does not commit the council to funding or delivering any of the projects itself, and some of these may well be provided by third parties. Some of the projects will attract external funding by developer contributions via Section 106 contributions and may also qualify for external grant funding, and the councils can also consider drawing down on Community Infrastructure Levy funding to support projects, subject to availability of CIL funds and other commitments on those funds.
25. Given the council's financial position, all capital schemes that are not externally funded will need to be prioritised based on their criticality to service delivery, and whether the potential borrowing costs incurred in delivering the scheme are expected to be covered by the revenue income/savings generated by them, in line with the council's capital strategy and forecast medium term financial position.

Legal Implications

26. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Climate and ecological impact implications

27. Delivery of the strategies will have climate and ecological implications, including on carbon emissions, carbon sequestration, land use and biodiversity. As stated in the report, there will be a need for all new proposals to fully consider these impacts and how to mitigate against them. Facilities will also need to consider how they can adapt to a changing climate, for example, with increased instances of flooding or extreme heat. One aim is to locate facilities close to where people live, which will encourage active, low-carbon means of travel. The detailed design of each development will be planned comprehensively in accordance with other policies in the joint local plan – including those on climate and ecology.

Equalities implications

28. Please see attached Equalities Impact Assessment screening reports at Appendix 5 and Appendix 6.

Risks

29. Should the strategies not be adopted, this will mean delay and not benefitting from the investment made in conducting the studies and creating new strategies with public engagement. It could cause confusion to the public and mean loss of opportunity to secure appropriate developer contributions in the absence of up-to-date strategies. It could have implications for securing S106 contributions from developers, and on the council directing CIL spending in line with an adopted strategy to support sport clubs and town and parish councils with new and improved facilities. Additionally, it could become challenging defend against inappropriate development or loss of pitches and leisure facilities without up-to-date data.

Other Implications

30. None identified.

Conclusion

31. Officers have worked with consultants STA to create a robust LFAS and PPS, which create an effective strategic framework for protecting and enhancing existing facilities and pitches and identifying the need for new ones in the district.
32. Key stakeholders, such as Sport England, national governing bodies, and sports clubs have been involved in the process, forming a steering group to help develop the direction of the strategies. The process also involved gathering extensive feedback from local clubs and facility operators, as well as on the ground surveys, at the launch of the project between December 2022 and January 2023.
33. The proposed strategies were publicly consulted on, going beyond the standards for creating such strategies in Sport England guidance. Following feedback received, a number of recommended changes were made to the strategies as set out in the paragraphs 16 and 17 above. We have included a full consultation report on each strategy as Appendix 4 to this report.
34. Subject to the adoption of the strategies, officers recommend that the council continues to work closely with the technical steering group (made up of council employees, Sport England and national governing bodies) to progress with Stage E (the delivery element of the Sport England guidance) to monitor, evaluate and review progress of the action plan. Along with the technical steering group, the council will also work with sports clubs, parish and town councils and other relevant groups to support with the delivery of the recommendations.
35. The draft strategies have also informed the development of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) that supports the council's consultation on the proposed submission Joint Local Plan. The IDP is a live document that officers can update to reflect any changes in infrastructure needs. It forms the basis for seeking infrastructure contributions and delivery on large scale housing sites.

Background Papers

- Appendix 1 – LFAS Report
- Appendix 2- PPS Report
- Appendix 3 – PPS Report Appendices
- Appendix 4 – Consultation Report
- Appendix 5 – LFAS EQIA Screening Report
- Appendix 6 – PPS EQIA Screening Report
- Appendix 7 – Changes Post Scrutiny