

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S  
REPORT TO**

**Cabinet**  
**21 April 2021**

**Report Title:** Newcastle under Lyme Playing Pitch Strategy 2021– 2026

**Submitted by:** Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth

**Portfolios:** Primarily Leisure, Culture and Heritage, but also Planning and Growth

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Purpose of the Report**

To seek approval to adopt the Newcastle-under Lyme Playing Pitch Strategy 2021-2026

**Recommendation**

1. That Cabinet approve the Newcastle under Lyme Playing Pitch Strategy 2021 – 2026 (PPS) which will be the basis for making strategic decisions on future playing pitch provision and associated facilities across the Borough.
2. That Cabinet agree that a review of the PPS is carried out by the Steering Group on an annual basis and that any significant changes are reported to Cabinet, to ensure that identified local priorities continue to be achieved.

**Reasons**

The PPS sets out the Council's strategy for identifying and meeting the playing pitch and associated facilities needs of the Borough from now through to 2026. It considers how well the existing playing pitch provision and associated facilities meet the needs of communities in terms of supply and demand throughout this time period.

The PPS identifies key areas of improvement to address the needs of the different sports, actions to improve existing sites, and recommends the disposal of sites that are of no value to sport.

The PPS forms part of the evidence base required in the development of the Local Plan.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 The last assessment of playing pitch provision in the Borough was carried out in 2015 in accordance with national guidance as set out in Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation Strategy (PPG17) study.
- 1.2 In order to drive forward the review of playing pitch provision in the Borough a steering group was established involving representatives from a range of internal teams and external partner organisations who have a role in shaping the future provision of playing pitches in the Borough:

**Internal teams:** Leisure and Cultural Services, Operational Services, Planning and Development and Assets and Regeneration.

**National Governing Bodies of Sport:** Staffordshire County Cricket Board, Staffordshire Football Association, Rugby Football Union, Golf England, England Netball, and England Hockey.

**Partner Organisations:** Active Together (County Sports Partnership) who also liaised with Staffordshire County Council on behalf of the Steering Group, Sport England.

- 1.3 The Steering Group developed a brief for the delivery of the PPS and subsequently specialist advice was commissioned from Knight Kavanagh and Page Ltd. (following procurement in accordance with the Councils Policies and procedures) to ensure that the preparation of the PPS was in accordance with Sport England's methodology.
- 1.4 The PPS guidance covers both natural and artificial pitches, which are used for football, cricket, rugby union and hockey. The strategy also covers bowls, netball, golf and tennis. The strategy therefore covers the wide range of pitch sports available in the Borough. All facilities in the Borough are included in the PPS regardless of ownership and/or management i.e. whether in the public, private, education, or third sector.
- 1.5 The completed PPS identifies local priorities which can be used to direct resources and guide planning policy. However the steering group have had to commit to an on-going review of the strategy and its' action plan to ensure it remains current and that where improvements /investment is recommended, proposals are viable and deliverable.
- 1.6 The implementation of the Strategy is dependent upon a range of funding streams, including the receipt of developer contributions collected via section 106 obligations and the community infrastructure levy (CIL). The Council is not yet committed to introducing a CIL, but because of competing priorities between CIL projects, it is anticipated that this source of funding will be limited. There is also an increased difficulty in securing developer contributions via section 106 agreements. This is because stringent tests, must be applied before a section 106 contribution can be sought and the potential impact on a scheme's viability.
- 1.7 It therefore needs to be recognised that both sources of developer contributions cannot be relied upon. Similarly the likely level of funding from the National Governing Bodies is unknown at this stage. Nevertheless, for the Local Plan to be sound it needs to be supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan which will identify priority projects for funding supported with realistic funding options. It is therefore necessary to commit to reviewing the Action Plan to refine the information on costs and potential funding in order to provide a robust evidence base for the Local Plan.

## 2. Issues

- 2.1 Playing pitches are an important resource in enabling healthy and active lifestyles in our communities. Good quality, accessible and suitable playing pitches with ancillary facilities provided in the right locations, deliver important opportunities for residents to participate in sporting activities at different levels. A priority of this Council is to support and encourage residents of all ages to stay fit and active and in doing so help avoid the pitfalls of inactivity and sedentary lifestyles which can contribute to poor health and affect quality of life.

- 2.2 There are a significant number of playing pitches within the Borough, used by a wide variety of organisations for an array of sports. These pitches are typically owned and managed by public sector bodies, educational establishments, the private sector, sports clubs and not for profit organisations.
- 2.3 The overall demand for, and nature of, the use of playing pitches and associated facilities in the Borough has changed since 2015 and is likely to change in the future. This can be attributed to a number of factors including new housing developments, differing participation rates in sport and an evolution in how individual sports and playing pitches are managed, along with changes to the Borough's demographic profile.
- 2.4 The PPS provides an up-to-date assessment of how well the current supply of playing pitches is meeting current levels of demand from communities. It identifies key actions for specific sites concerning their ongoing maintenance and improvement to meet the needs of individual sports and communities.
- 2.5 The PPS has been developed to provide:
- A vision for the future improvement and prioritisation of playing pitches.
  - A number of aims to help deliver the recommendations and actions.
  - A series of strategic recommendations which provide a strategic 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.
  - A prioritised area-by-area Action Plan to address key issues on a site-by-site basis.
- 2.6 Although the PPS will report on Newcastle-under-Lyme as a whole, the Authority has been divided into the five analysis areas that reflect on the geographical and demographical nature of the area. These are; Kidsgrove, Rural Central and Keele, Rural North, Rural South, Urban Newcastle North, South, and Central.
- 2.7 The PPS also examined cross boundary issues to determine the level of imported and exported demand, recognising, for example, that people travel to and make use of strategic facilities irrespective of administrative boundaries. Neighbouring authorities include Cheshire East, City of Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire, Stafford, and Staffordshire Moorlands.
- 2.8 The PPS has highlighted the following findings for the following sporting activities:

### **Grass football pitch recommendations**

- Protect existing quantity of pitches until all demand is being met (unless replacement provision meets Sport England requirements and is agreed upon and provided).
- Sustain pitch quality and seek improvements where necessary via utilisation of the FA's Pitch Improvement Programme.
- Work to accommodate future demand at sites which are not operating at capacity or at sites not currently available for community use that could be moving forward.
- Explore the creation of a within grass pitch hub site in the UNNS&C Analysis Area in order to provide clubs better quality ancillary and pitch provision in order to address shortfalls.

### **3G pitch recommendations**

- Protect the current stock of 3G pitches.
- Create two additional full size 3G pitches to alleviate all current shortfalls with one each in the Kidsgrove and UNNS&C analysis areas.
- Look to create a further smaller 3G pitch to address future shortfalls in the Rural South Analysis Area
- Encourage more match play demand to transfer to 3G pitches and ensure that pitches remain suitable to accommodate such demand through appropriate certification when it is required.
- Ensure that any new 3G pitches are priced competitively against the cost of hiring a grass pitches and are aimed at local grassroots clubs.

### **Cricket recommendations**

- Protect all cricket squares in current use.
- Work with clubs and grounds staff to review quality issues on squares to ensure appropriate quality is achieved at sites assessed as standard and sustained at sites assessed as good.
- Explore options to accommodate expressed future demand through the provision of additional grass cricket squares to the installation of NTPs, with preferences towards the latter.

### **Rugby union recommendations**

- Existing quantity of rugby union pitches to be protected or be fully mitigated to meet National Planning Policy.
- Improve pitch quality at secure sites to alleviate overplay and create actual spare capacity.

### **Hockey recommendations**

- Protect all existing full size sand-based AGPs for hockey use.
- When the 3G pitch stock increases, encourage the transfer of football demand from the sand-based AGPs in order to free up increased capacity for hockey activity.

### **Tennis recommendations**

- Retain and sustain quality of club courts for competitive play through implementation of appropriate maintenance regimes.
- Examine re-establishing demand at Westland's Tennis Centre.
- Improve quality of key local authority courts and accompanying ancillary provision, first and foremost focusing on sites that best accommodate informal play.
- Explore implementation of ClubSpark, Rally and Gate Access schemes at appropriate sites to enhance available provision for informal tennis.

### **Bowling Green recommendations**

- Retain/improve the existing quantity of greens.

### **Golf recommendations**

Retain all currently used golf courses and driving ranges.

### ***Netball recommendations***

- Protect the current quantity of courts.
- Seek to improve poor quality courts quality through resurfacing or improved maintenance

2.9 There is a requirement for regular monitoring and review against the actions identified in PPS. This will be undertaken annually by the steering group. The review will also contribute to the information relied upon during the independent examination of the Local Plan.

### **3. Proposal**

3.1 That Cabinet approve the Newcastle under Lyme Playing Pitch Strategy 2015 – 2020 (PPS) which will be the basis for making strategic decisions on future playing pitch provision and associated facilities across the Borough.

3.2 That a review of the PPS is carried out by the Steering Group on an annual basis and that any significant changes are reported to Cabinet, to ensure that identified local priorities continue to be achieved.

### **4. Reasons for Proposed Solution**

4.1 The PPS sets out the Council's strategy for identifying and meeting the playing pitch and associated facilities needs for the Borough between 2021 and 2026. It considers how well the existing playing pitch provision and associated facilities meet the needs of communities within the Borough in terms of supply and demand.

4.2 The PPS identifies key areas of improvement to address the specific needs of the different sports, actions to improve existing sites where appropriate, and recommends the disposal of sites which do not make a strategic contribution in meeting current or future demand for sport.

4.3 The PPS forms part of the suite of documents that are needed to contribute to the evidence base required in the development of the Local Plan. The PPS also satisfies the majority requirements of the NPPF by identifying what the local priorities are. To remain relevant the PPS needs to be accurately maintained and developed further to identifying the necessary resources to fund priced up improvement plans to meet future demand

### **5. Options Considered**

5.1 The adoption of the PPS is the only option available to the Council that supports appropriate/timely strategic decision making concerning the provision of outdoor sports facilities the residents of the Borough can benefit from.

### **6. Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 The PPS follows the latest Sport England methodology and will be a key strategic document which will inform the local Plan.

## 7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 The adoption of the PPS should have a positive impact for all residents, including those with protected characteristics, because the provision of new and or improved sports facilities and pitches will be of benefit to all sectors of the community.

## 8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 There are no immediate financial implications for the Council arising from the PPS.

8.2 The PPS also provides a basis to seek future external funding for improvements to playing pitches and associated facilities. Although further work by the steering group is required because of the current uncertainty around developer contributions either through Section 106 Agreements or the Community Infrastructure Levy, if adopted by the Council.

8.3 However, any contributions will need to be both directly related to a development, as well as, 'fair and reasonable in scale'. It should be noted that there are no longer National Standards for developer contributions arising from new planning applications, as the NPPF emphasises the importance of identifying local priorities according to local need. This is one of the main reasons why the PPS needs to be kept updated as it will be relied upon by Sport England in their role as a statutory consultee.

8.4 Should it be identified that there is a requirement for the Council to make a financial contribution to projects, this will be considered as part of the Newcastle Capital Investment Programme.

## 9. **Major Risks**

9.1 The PPS enables the Council to manage the risks when making strategic decisions concerning the provision of playing pitches and associated facilities in the Borough

## 10. **UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)**

10.1 The PPS supports UNSG and Climate Change objectives in a number of ways. Principally, through partnership working, improving health and wellbeing and supporting, infrastructure and skills, the following UNSGs are supported.



## 11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 This is a key decision and appears on the Council's forward plan.

## 12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 None

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 None

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 Playing Pitch Strategy 2021-26