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**Environment and Communities Committee**

**11 March 2024**

**Updated Playing Pitch and Open Spaces Strategy**

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**Report of: Tom Shuttleworth, Interim Director Environment and Neighbourhoods**

**Report Reference No: EC/27/23-24**

**Ward(s) Affected: ALL**

**Purpose of Report**

- 1 To update members of the Committee on the progress of updating the Cheshire East Playing Pitch and Outdoor Spaces Strategy (PPOSS) and seeks approval for its formal adoption.

**Executive Summary**

- 2 The primary purpose of the PPOSS is, to provide a strategic framework, to ensure that the provision of outdoor playing pitches meets the local and community needs of the existing and future residents as well as visitors to Cheshire East.
- 3 The PPOSS has been produced in accordance with national planning guidance and provides a robust and objective justification for future playing pitch provision throughout the borough.
- 4 Developing a strategic approach using the analysis of the playing pitch and outdoor sport supply and demand is necessary to:
  - Provide the evidence base to assist in the safeguarding of protect playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities against development pressures on land in, and around, urban areas.
  - Identify pitch (natural grass and artificial) and outdoor sport supply and demand issues in relation to predicated population changes.

- Address 'demand' pressures created as a result of specific sports development pressures e.g. growth of mini soccer and wider use of artificial grass pitches.
- Focus limited financial resources into the areas of greatest demand.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Environment and Communities committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the adoption of the Playing Pitch and Outdoors Spaces Strategy

### **Background**

- 5 The Assessment Report at Appendix A provides up-to-date supply and demand information. It considers the demands arising from the planned level of growth proposed in the Council's Local Plan Strategy to 2030. In compiling the Assessment Report, the Council have worked closely with the National Governing Bodies to ensure that this information is as comprehensive and up to date as possible.
- 6 The findings of the Assessment Report are broadly in line with the previous Playing Pitch Strategy. The details of the clubs consulted are detailed from p.86 onwards of the Demand Assessment Report included at Appendix A.
- 7 The current Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) was first developed over 5 years ago, and reviewed in early 2021, it was necessary for a more detailed review and analysis to be undertaken, because the existing PPS excluded several sports such a crown green bowls. The current PPOSS is outdated, and Sport England has recommended that the Council is required to have an updated strategy in place to support the Council's planning policy and to support any future funding applications that may be made which are included in the PPOSS.
- 8 The review was based upon a clear objective which was focused with a desired outcome to support the Council and its partners in the creation of:

'An accessible, high quality and sustainable network of sports pitches and outdoor sports facilities that provides and promotes

local opportunities for participation by all residents, irrespective of ability, at all levels of play from grassroots to elite.'

- 9 To achieve this strategic vision, the PPOSS has the following aims:
  - (a) To ensure that all facilities are protected for the long-term benefit of sport;
  - (b) To promote a sustainable approach to the provision of playing pitches, outdoor sport facilities and management of sports clubs;
  - (c) To ensure that there are sufficient facilities in the right location to meet current and projected future demand;
  - (d) To ensure that all clubs have access to affordable facilities of appropriate quality to meet their current needs and longer-term aspirations and;
  - (e) To ensure that all providers ensure all facilities meet up-to-date standards of accessibility.
- 10 The PPOSS has been prepared by a partnership of sports organisations with the Council being the lead organisation. The sports organisations have a vested interest in ensuring existing playing fields, pitches, and ancillary facilities, as well as other outdoor sports can be protected and enhanced. Many of the objectives and actions contained within the PPOSS will be delivered and implemented by sports organisations as well as the Council.
- 11 In developing the PPOSS the Council established a Steering group that had representatives from the key departments within the Council (Planning, Green Spaces and ANSA) as well as Sport England and the National Governing Bodies (NGB) for sport (England Cricket, Football Foundation, British Cycling, England Hockey, and Rugby as well as several other NGB's)
- 12 In total 223 sports clubs were contacted and consulted to establish what their current and future needs are, this was split between Summer Sports which was undertaken in August 2023 and Winter Sports which was undertaken in November 2023.
- 13 A summary of the responses and how these have informed the updated strategy are set out within the document itself, and contained within the individual sections that are relevant to their individual sports.
- 14 The updated PPOSS is attached at Appendix B.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 15 This strategy provides an evidential basis that can be referred to in planning decisions, funding bids and can be used as background evidence to support Local Plan policies in relation to outdoor sport. It will ensure that this evidence is sound, robust, and capable of being scrutinised through examination and meets the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) .
- 16 Planning Policy and other relevant sport related corporate strategies must continue to be based upon a robust evidential basis to ensure that planning and sports development policy can be implemented efficiently and effectively:
- 17 It ensures a strategic approach to playing pitch provision. The PPOSS will act as a tool for Cheshire East Council and partner organisations to guide resource allocation and set priorities for pitch and outdoor sports in the future.
- 18 It provides robust evidence for capital funding. As well as proving the need for developer contributions towards pitches, outdoor sport facilities and ancillary facilities. A PPOSS can provide evidence of need for a range of capital grants. Current funding examples include the Sport England Funding Programmes, Heritage Lottery Fund (for park improvements), the Football Foundation and the Big Lottery.
- 19 It helps in the achievement of the Council Corporate Plan – in particular the ‘green’ priority, the key for open green space, that outlines ‘we will lead our communities to protect and enhance our environment, tackle the climate emergency and drive sustainable development’.
- 20 It helps with the protection of pitch and outdoor sports facilities to ensure that opportunities are not lost in the future due a lack of facilities.

## **Other Options Considered**

- 21 The Council has the option to proceed without adopting an updated PPOSS. This would undermine the ability of the Council and other sporting bodies to improve existing and provide for new sports fields in the borough, as well as precluding the opportunity to secure S106 contributions from developers.

## Implications and Comments

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 22 Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 confers on local authorities' general powers to provide recreational facilities, including) outdoor facilities consisting of pitches for team games, Further, the Local Government Act 2000 provides local authorities with the discretionary power to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of their area. The provision of the sporting facilities such as playing pitches falls within the above statutory provisions.
- 23 There are no legal implications at this stage other than the impact on Local Plan production should be noted.
- 24 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the reformed planning policies for England. It details how these changes are expected to be applied to the planning system. It also provides a framework for local people and their councils to produce distinct local and neighbourhood plans, reflecting the needs and priorities of local communities.
- 25 As a prerequisite the NPPF states existing open space, sports, and recreation sites, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:
- An assessment has been undertaken, which has clearly shown the site to be surplus to requirements.
  - The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location.
  - The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.
- 26 The PPPOSS seeks to provide guidance for planning decisions made across the Borough. By addressing the issues identified in the Assessment Report and using the strategic framework presented in this Strategy, the current and future sporting and recreational needs of the Borough can be satisfied. The POSS identifies where there is a deficiency in provision and identifies how best to resolve this in the future. The NPPF requires planning policies to be based on robust and up to date assessments of the need for open space, sport, and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, what resources are needed, and which plans should

then seek to accommodate. The PPOSS fulfils this requirement and forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan.

- 27 There is both a reputational risk (through having commissioned an up-to-date assessment and then not taken its recommendations on board) and a risk of non-compliance with national planning policy, should the PPOSS not be adopted by the Council.

#### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 28 The production of the strategy has been delivered within existing service budgets. The strategy once adopted provides a framework for investment and doesn't commit the council to any specific expenditure.

#### **Policy**

- 29 The PPOSS is most closely linked to the aims of Cheshire East's Local Plan Strategy (2010 – 2030, adopted in 2017) which sets out the overall planning framework for the Borough including for the provision of at least 36,000 additional homes.
- 30 Specifically, the 'Stronger Communities' policies are most relevant to the PPOSS including:
- (a) Supporting proposals for facilities that would not be appropriate to be located in or adjacent to centres, provided they are highly accessible by a choice of transport, do not harm the character, amenity, or biodiversity value of the area, and satisfy a range of other criteria.
- 31 Policy SC2: Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities which seeks to provide appropriate sports facilities for the communities of Cheshire East.
- (a) Protect existing indoor and outdoor sports facilities.
  - (b) Support new indoor and outdoor sports facilities.
- 32 Policy SC3: Health and Well-Being
- (a) Seeks to create and safeguard opportunities for safe, healthy, fulfilling and active lifestyles.
  - (b) The Site Allocation and Development Policies Document is the second part of the Council's Local Plan is at examination stage. This Plan contains more detailed, non-strategic policies to inform development management decision making. Chapter 11 relates to Recreation and community facilities. There are to policies of particular relevance:

- 33 Policy REC 1 (Open space protection) which sets out the limited circumstances in which open space (including for outdoor sport) may be lost
- 34 Policy REC 3 (Open space implementation) which importantly confirms that the provision of, or contribution to, outdoor playing pitch sports facilities will be informed by the Playing Pitch Strategy and Sport England Sport Pitch Calculator

#### Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 35 An EIA has been developed in support of the proposed updated Strategy and is contained at Appendix C.
- 36 In summary the following can be seen;
- (a) The PPOSS identifies the facilities required to manage the current and demand for adult, junior and youth sport. Also identifies need for outdoor sport, in which the older population are more likely to participate, such as bowls and tennis.

#### Human Resources

- 37 There are no human resource implications of this report.

#### Risk Management

- 38 The main risk of not having an updated PPOSS is the inability to secure contributions from developers. As highlighted in the report the PPOSS need to be based on robust, up-to-date data in order to provide the evidence base to secure these financial contributions or safeguard areas which are required for sports pitch and open space provisions.

#### *Rural Communities*

- 39 There is no direct impact as part of this report, but the Strategy has been informed by considerations from a significant numbers of sports clubs across the borough, several of which are within rural areas.

#### *Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)*

- 40 The provision of quality playing field provision will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the Cheshire East Community and will in time aid in the improvement of the availability of facilities for children and young people.

## *Public Health*

- 41 The Strategy supports the councils public health through the following planning polices
- (a) Policy SC1: Leisure and Recreation which seeks to support and promote the provision of better leisure, community and recreation facilities.
    - (i) Seek to protect and enhance existing leisure and recreation facilities, unless they are proven surplus to requirements or unless improved alternative provision, of similar or better quality, is to be made.
    - (ii) Support and promote the provision of better leisure, community and recreation facilities, where there is a need for such facilities, the proposed facilities are of a type and scale appropriate to the size of the settlement, are accessible and support the objectives of the Local Plan Strategy.

## *Climate Change*

- 42 There are no specific implications for climate change arising from this report.

| <b>Access to Information</b> |  |
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| Appendices:                  | Appendix A – Demand Assessment Report<br>Appendix B – Playing Pitch and Open Spaces Strategy (for approval)<br>Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment |
| Background Papers:           | Cheshire East Playing Pitch Strategy 2021 - <a href="https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk">Playing Pitch Strategy (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</a>                 |