

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference: C/076/2007-08.**

**Date of meeting: 12 November 2007.**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio: Leisure and Young People.**

**Subject: Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan.**

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### **Recommendations:**

**(1) That the ratification of the District Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan, with key recommendations for Epping Forest District, be agreed as follows:**

**(a) that the re-designating of certain adult pitches for other sports or age groups - to be dictated by the need for junior/mini pitches as identified in the Strategy - be considered by the Council, Town and Parish Councils;**

**(b) that Active Epping Forest (Community Sports Network) be established and developed in the District, to work with local sports clubs, sports facilities, providers, schools and other key stakeholders in sport, to promote and develop sport within Epping Forest District;**

**(c) that further community use of local school, college and club facilities be encouraged by the District Council and local Councils where possible; and,**

**(d) that developer contributions be secured by the Council wherever possible, to improve the quality of existing playing pitches or alternative sporting provision in the district and provide new facilities where a shortfall has been identified.**

**(e) that the Council's aim be to match any developer contributions through seeking external funding and working in partnership with key stakeholders.**

### **Report:**

1. Leisure Services has developed a 10 Year Playing Pitch Strategy, which sets out the way forward for the provision of pitch sports facilities in the District. The strategy identifies current issues of capacity and quality of pitches provided and is intended to give direction and guidance to all those involved in providing pitch sport facilities in Epping Forest. A copy of the Final Draft Playing Pitch Strategy will be available in the Members Room as from 5 November.

2. The Strategy focuses on the current level of pitch provision within the District and will assist the Council in meeting the requirements for playing pitches in accordance with the methodology developed by Sport England. It will also provide information for decision-making and future development proposals in the Epping Forest District.

3. The recommendations outlined in the Playing Pitch Strategy are directed at all those with an involvement in playing pitch provision to ensure that future provision of pitches is balanced, meets the needs of the community and is protected for future generations.

4. The Strategy represents the key findings arising from extensive survey work and consultation, highlighting areas of concern and opportunity. It is important to note that the strategy is primarily concerned with the provision of playing pitches (defined by Sport England as 'a delineated area which, together with run off area, is of 0.4 hectares or more, and which is used for association football, rugby, cricket, hockey)' and not playing fields, nor open spaces (which include grass or other areas which are not used for sport). This is an important distinction because some of the areas surrounding pitches are not used for sport are important in terms of open space.

5. Through the development of the Playing Pitch Strategy, it has been identified that Epping Forest compares favourably nationally, in terms of the number of adult sports pitches (1 pitch to every 647 adults in the district) and is particularly strong in terms of adult football pitches. However, such pitches are generally of an 'average' to 'good' quality. Epping Forest currently has an adequate supply of pitches for cricket, hockey and rugby. Some facilities in the district currently have a surplus of adult pitches at certain times, but this is offset by the reduction in availability of pitches that are subject to flooding and this is particularly the case for pitches situated in the Roding Valley.

6. The key deficiencies in provision are however, junior and youth pitches, which are considerably less than other districts and there is a distinct need for district providers to meet existing and potential demand, by either installing new junior size pitches on existing sites; re-designating adult size pitches, or, by establishing new facilities specifically for junior use.

7. Leisure Services is currently working with local partners to establish a Community Sports Network in the District (Active Epping Forest), which will enable improved communication of local need, between local clubs and the District and local Councils. Active Epping Forest will become one of the sub groups of the Local Strategic Partnership and it's Action Plan will contain a key target of ensuring that local facilities for pitch sports, meet local demand.

8. The Council and Town/Parish Councils have a key role in planning, providing and coordinating provision of playing pitches in the District and as so, should assist and encourage other providers such as local schools; college and clubs to allow community access and to maintain and enhance the quality of their pitch provision.

9. Opportunities for new pitch facilities in the District are very limited, but occasionally become available as part of new housing developments in the area. Without these opportunities, the likelihood of new pitch provision particularly in the south of the district is limited, due to the lack of designated open space. However, Leisure Services is currently working with Planning Officers and the Grange Farm Trust to secure new pitch facilities as part of the development of Grange Farm, Chigwell, as part of a Section 106 agreement. It is therefore suggested that every possible opportunity to secure land for new pitch provision is considered as part of new housing developments in the District.

10. Where Section 106 agreements are negotiated to establish new pitch facilities, it is possible to attract external funding to the District through organizations such as the Football Foundation. Leisure Services has a track record of securing external funding for local projects and will aim to work with local partners to maximize funding for new pitch provision where deficits have been highlighted.

11. Availability of open space for conversion to playing pitches is also an issue in the central parts of the District, but this may be compensated by the availability of existing playing fields at Ongar Leisure Centre, Ongar. The Council has already committed to support the development of a new junior multi-sport hub site at Ongar and Leisure Services is currently working with the Football Foundation and Essex Football Association to develop a funding application for the site. If successful, the development will see the establishment of a range of pitch facilities at Ongar and a four changing room pavilion.

### Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

12. The Playing Pitch Strategy has identified a range of issues in relation to availability, quantity and quality of playing pitches in the District. The Strategy recommendations seek to address these issues to ensure provision of adequate playing pitch facilities in the future.

### Other Options for Action:

13. To not ratify the Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan.

### Consultation Undertaken:

14. Consultation was undertaken both internally (Council Officers) and externally (National Governing Bodies, Development Officers, Facility providers, Clubs, Schools, Colleges and Town/Parish Councils).

15. The table below provides a summary of the consultation that took place.

	Questionnaires Sent	Questionnaires Returned	% data received
<b>Sports Clubs</b>			
Association Football	93	26	27%
Cricket	16	12	75%
Hockey	1	1	100%
Rugby Union	4	1	25%
Athletics	1	1	100%
Multi-sports Club	2	2	100%
<b>Schools/Colleges</b>			
Primary	40	20	50%
Secondary	6	6	100%
Special	2	1	50%
College	1	1	100%
<b>Other Providers</b>			
Town/Parish Councils	24	12	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>44%</b>

16. At 44%, the overall questionnaire response rate was considerably higher than average (25% is considered a 'good' response) and this was supplemented with a large number of additional telephone interviews and site visits. A 100% response rate was not required as those that did not return their questionnaire were contacted via phone and visits as well obtaining information from league and club handbooks and websites. The purpose of these surveys was to cross check information and gather qualitative information (comments) from clubs.

### Resource Implications:

**Budget Provision:** The Playing Pitch Strategy is a key requirement to unlock a range of external funding opportunities for pitch sports and other sports facilities.

**Personnel:** N/A.

**Land:** N/A.

**Council Plan 2006-10/BVPP Reference:** None.

**Relevant Statutory Powers:** None.

**Background Papers:** Epping Forest Play Strategy Cabinet report from 3 September 2007.

**Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:** N/A.

**Key Decision Reference (if required):** Key Decision.