

Executive Summary

The Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy has been developed during 2011 using best practice guidance from Sport England. It assesses current and future demand over the next 14 years, and provides a robust framework for resource prioritisation and informed planning decisions.

The strategy has been developed through consultation with Sport England, National Governing Bodies of Sport, sports clubs, league associations, schools, universities, colleges and council employees. It has been informed by a review of the pavilions and reviewing our sports provision.

While there are some links with the City's Green Spaces Strategy, there are also a number of key differences; on supply and demand for sports facilities, producing a robust planning document and also evidencing the need for developer contributions.

The number of outdoor areas used for sport and physical activity that are accessible to the public include: 117 playing pitches, 12 Synthetic Turf Pitches, 58 tennis courts and 14 Multi Use Games Areas. The playing pitches are used for a number of different sports including football, cricket, rugby and hockey.

The objectives of the strategy are:

1. To gather the best available supply and demand data on playing pitches and other outdoor sports facilities.
2. To assess the supply and demand data in line with available national guidance and identified good practice.
3. To ensure a good level of consultation with key parties throughout the development of the strategy.
4. To provide a robust evidence base, which can be used by a range of Council departments and other parties to help protect and improve the provision of playing pitches and other outdoor sports facilities.
5. To establish a clear prioritised list of actions, which will help to maintain and increase participation levels in sport and physical activity in the city and ensure the efficient use of resources.
6. To establish clear prioritised infrastructure requirements, including where new facilities are required and existing facilities should be enhanced, including ancillary facilities e.g. pavilions.
7. To identify and promote good practice regarding the provision, management and maintenance of playing pitches in the city.
8. To establish a process to ensure the regular review and update of the strategy and the information on which it is based.

These objectives support the corporate plan outcome of Strong and Active Communities; helping to achieve the far reaching cross societal health, wellbeing and community benefits enabled by taking part in sport and physical activity.

The strategy incorporates all sectors, including local authority, education (both schools and universities), private sports grounds, and develops its recommendations based on facilities that are accessible to the community.

The main conclusion from the strategy is that there is currently a shortage of playing pitch provision in Oxford that has secured community use; this is especially prevalent in cricket. Given this shortfall the assessment suggests that all provision within the city should be protected. The strategy does not necessarily suggest that additional new pitches are required to meet the shortfall, as once you add back in those, unsecured, pitches that have community use, there appears to be adequate provision for all sports. However the provision of youth and mini football is an exception, but this shortfall in the main, can be addressed by the spare capacity in other pitch provision. The aim of the Council should be to continue to look to secure community access against other providers playing pitches in key strategic areas.

It is important to note that any loss of provision would place greater pressure on the other remaining facilities. Where development which would adversely affect pitch provision may be proposed, then adequate replacement (equivalent or improved) should be secured in line with government policy guidance for the protection of playing field land. However, given the land restrictions in the city, the opportunities available to secure replacement playing pitch provision are limited.

The pitches within the city are generally of good quality and this needs to be maintained to ensure no reduction in their capacity. However, the assessment has indicated that there are some issues of poor quality with ancillary facilities, such as pavilions, that need to be addressed through a phased program of improvements.

Based on Sport England recommendations, the new developments at Court Place Farm, Banbury Road North and The Oxford Academy, have now addressed the previous undersupply of full size astroturf pitches. It is important that any new astroturf type facilities demonstrate need, innovation or that they specifically target an area of the market where demand has not been fully met yet, for example in regards to a small sided facility.

There has been a significant drop in participation in bowls in the city, and this should be closely monitored and reviewed in relation to participation and value for money. Within the strategy, other sports facilities, such as Multi-Use Games Areas, tennis courts and athletics have also been looked at with the key actions to ensure that there is a funded improvement and maintenance program for them.

To ensure that Oxford continues its recent trend of increasing participation in sport and physical activity, it is important that the action plan is implemented and that the strategy is updated on an annual basis and refreshed every five years.

Sport England has supplied the following quote:

“Sport England believes that the best way to protect and enhance playing fields is for all local authorities to have a robust and up to date Playing Pitch Strategy in place for their area, backed by appropriate management and maintenance arrangements. We are, therefore, pleased to be working with Oxford City Council to assess the adequacy of playing pitch provision in the City and to support the development of a strategy. The commitment of the Leisure team to leading this work and developing the consultation draft document has been impressive.”