

To: Cabinet
Date: 13 July 2022
Report of: Head of Community Services
Title of Report: Oxford Playing Pitch Strategy 2022-2036

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To seek approval for the Oxford Playing Pitch Strategy 2022 – 2036
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks
Corporate Priority:	Support thriving communities; Pursue a zero carbon Oxford; Enable an inclusive economy.
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24

Recommendation: That Cabinet resolves to:
1. Approve the Oxford Playing Pitch Strategy 2022 – 2036 which will help enable residents to maintain active lifestyles on fit for purpose outdoor playing pitches.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Risk Register
Appendix 2	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 3	Oxford Playing Pitch Strategy 2022-2036

Introduction and background

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that [the value and impact of our green spaces for our communities has never been greater](#) for mental, physical and social wellbeing. It is key that we continue to take advantage of the benefits that sport and physical activity can bring; the power it has to unite communities around key agendas such as tackling climate change and racism, and the role our pitches and facilities have in reducing health inequalities and inactivity.
2. The overriding purpose of the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) is to help ensure the city has a good supply of well-managed, maintained and efficient playing pitches

and other outdoor sports facilities which meet identified needs and encourage residents to maintain and increase an active lifestyle.

3. The Council had an existing Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy already in place for Oxford until 2026. However to ensure this remained robust against the changes in Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidelines and the evolving priorities of the Council, the decision was made (after consultation with key partners including Sport England), to re-new the strategy.
4. One of the key drivers behind the PPS is to ensure a more joined up approach to the provision of playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities within the city; bringing together key providers including Schools, Universities, Local Authorities and National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs).
5. The PPS has been developed using best practice guidance and methodology from Sport England to assess current and future demand over the next 14 years from 2022 to 2036. It provides a robust framework for resource prioritisation and informed planning decisions.
6. The main sports that have formed the assessment are football, rugby, cricket and hockey, with other sports including tennis, netball, softball, lacrosse, Gaelic football and quidditch as well as the artificial grass pitches in the city.

Relationship to other strategies

7. The strategy aligns with other key Council documents including our [Green Spaces Strategy](#), our emerging Thriving Communities Strategy and the [Council's Corporate Plan](#).
8. In addition, by working collaboratively the strategy links to the Strategic Plans of the NGBs of the sports that are the main pitch users in the city.

Data collection and consultation

9. To develop the strategy key partners were engaged to form a representative Steering Group which included Sport England, NGBs, Universities, the local Playing Fields Association and City Council employees from the Active Communities and Planning departments.
10. Following Sport England's five stage process; data that evidenced supply and demand of pitch usage was collected as well as views on the quality of pitch and ancillary stock provision.
11. A non-technical assessment with photographic and/or video evidence was completed and collected for all City Council owned community pitches. Consultation was also carried out with local schools and relevant sports clubs via a survey that was made available electronically and on paper.
12. Meetings were held with the NGBs of the other sports that utilise the city's playing pitches so that the strategy incorporates all sectors and develops its recommendations based on facilities that are accessible to the community.
13. This data was then assessed to determine how well the needs of the current and future population were being met, this enabled a clear Action Plan to be developed.

14. The initial main body of data was collected in the period leading up to the end of 2019, but when the global COVID-19 pandemic struck in early 2020, the final development of the strategy was delayed in consultation with the Steering Group. The Steering Group ensured any known, significant changes to this data and the local sporting landscape have now been added to ensure the recommendations and actions are relevant and up to date.

Summary of key findings and recommendations

15. The main outcome from the strategy is that there is currently some shortage of playing pitch provision in Oxford and, in particular, pitches that have secured community use.
16. The strategy does not however suggest that additional new pitches are required to meet the shortfall. Once you add back in those unsecured pitches that have community use or sites that are interested in starting to offer community use, plus planned third generation artificial pitch (3G) developments; there appears to be adequate provision for all sports.
17. The Steering Group should continue to look to secure Community Use Agreements (CUAs) with other providers of playing pitches such as educational sites; to meet both current and future demand.
18. The pitches within the city vary in quality, ranging from some which are at an unsatisfactory standard, to examples of good and great pitches in places.
19. The Council will continue to assess and look for opportunities, in partnership with the NGBs, to improve those that fall below an acceptable parks provision standard.
20. It is important to note that any loss of provision would place greater pressure on the other remaining facilities and so all existing provision should be protected within the city.
21. Where development that 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 and in line with policies within our local plan.
22. To ensure that Oxford continues to increase participation in sport, recreation and physical activity, it is important that the action plan is implemented and that the strategy is reviewed on an annual basis and refreshed every five years.

Financial implications

23. Once approved, the strategy will form a robust document with an evidence base that will help support applications for securing external funding and streamlining developer contributions, Community Infrastructure Levy (a charge which can be levied by local authorities on new developments) or any future iterations such as the proposed local infrastructure levy.
24. There is no direct call for additional Council funding to support this and the action plan within the strategy highlights a way forward in regards to trying to identify external funding for various improvements. Should sports clubs or community

groups want to apply for Council funding, then they might be eligible subject to meeting terms and conditions, through the Council's grant programme.

Legal issues

25. There are no direct legal implications arising out of the contents of this report, however Sport England recommends that Local Authorities should have a Playing Pitch strategy in place. It is also likely that funding from Sport England and National Governing bodies will require this as evidence of need and demand.

Level of risk

26. The strategy helps provide the needs and evidence base for playing pitches across the City and helps to promote active lifestyle, whilst helping to address health inequalities. Without this in place it would become more difficult to deliver these outcomes.
27. Also, this strategy will positively contribute to the evidence base for setting the Community Infrastructure Levy as well as applying for external funding from National Governing Bodies and Sport England. It will also become increasingly difficult to secure any external funding or contribution against them, without the strategy in place.
28. The risk register is shown in Appendix 1.

Equalities impact

29. One of the key aims of the strategy is to reduce inequalities, increase diversity and to try and get more people participating in sport and physical activity.
30. The Equalities Impact Assessment is shown in appendix two.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

31. The strategy aligns with the Council's policies and commitments relating to carbon, and the environment and helps to maintain and improve air quality and enhance biodiversity.
32. Natural turf pitches and surrounding areas play a role in combating the effects of climate change in regards to preventing flooding and by providing carbon storage in the grasslands. These large, open green spaces also help tackle urban heat build-up in otherwise dense residential areas within the city.
33. Natural turf pitches contribute to providing a mosaic of vital urban habitat and food sources for a wide variety insects, bird and small mammal species, helping to protect and enhance biodiversity.
34. There is no recommended loss of playing pitch provision within the strategy and so these positive environmental impacts are protected.
35. Any improvements around ancillary facilities such as pavilions, will ensure that steps to become more energy efficient have been considered.
36. The strategy encourages a collaborative Healthy Place Shaping* approach to the implementation of the Action Plan with support and encouragement for active travel considerations.

**A Healthy Place Shaping approach aims to create: sustainable, well designed and thriving communities, which provide a sense of belonging, and where all residents are supported to live healthier and happier lives.*

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Background Papers:	
1	Oxford Playing Pitch Strategy 2022-2036

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