Wyre Playing Pitch Strategy

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To inform Cabinet of the completed Wyre Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and seek endorsement of the document’s content for Development Management purposes.

2. Outcomes

2.1 An approved Wyre Playing Pitch Strategy will be used as material considerations in the determination of planning applications in connection with playing pitches in the borough and as part of the evidence base for the emerging Wyre Local Plan.

3. Recommendation/s

3.1 That approval is given to use the Wyre Playing Pitch Strategy by Development Management as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

4. Background

4.1 After a tender and interview process, a consortium of consultants led by MD2 were appointed to undertake the Wyre Green Infrastructure Study. The consultants produced 3 main documents as part of the Study which are:

1. An Open Space Audit and Needs Assessment (updating and expanding on work done in house in 2007 and 2010).
**4.2** Green Infrastructure is the network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features like rivers, canals and the intertidal sands. It is multifunctional, including being used for wildlife and ecology, recreation, water storage, carbon storage (therefore a link to reducing the effects of climate change), food production, health and sustainable travel (trails, canals).

**4.3** The Wyre Green Infrastructure Study was commissioned because there was a gap in the emerging local plan’s evidence base with the outputs from it intended to address these. In commenting upon the Wyre Core Strategy Preferred Options public consultation in 2012, which has been and will be used to inform the preparation of the emerging Wyre Local Plan, Sport England strongly advocated producing a Playing Pitch Strategy in order to assess current and future demand and supply and ensure that there was compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Combining the Playing Pitch Strategy along with an Open Space Audit and a Green Infrastructure Strategy as part of an overall Green Infrastructure Study commission was seen as an opportunity to deliver cost savings in producing the local plan evidence base as there was some overlap in terms of the work it entailed.

**4.4** In seeking to deliver sustainable development the National Planning Policy Framework includes thirteen headings, one of which is Promoting Healthy Communities. Under this heading paragraph 73 indicates that planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. Assessments should identify needs and quantitative and qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreation facilities in a local area with information gained from assessments to be used to determine what open space, sports and recreation provision is required.

**4.5** Notably paragraph 74 of the NPPF states that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- 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; or
- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

**4.6** During the course of the early stages of preparation of the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) in October 2013 Sport England issued a new methodology “Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance. An approach to developing and delivering a playing pitch strategy” which required the appointed consultants to amend their methodology in undertaking the PPS. The updated Sport England guidance advocates a 5 stage process
in producing a PPS as follows:

**Stage A - Prepare and Tailor the Approach.**
This includes considering why the strategy is being developed, identifying a vision, objectives and time period that it covers, defining the study area and establishing a steering group to oversee the work.

**Stage B – Gathering information and views on the supply of and demand for provision.**

**Stage C – Assess the supply and demand information and views.**
This includes understanding individual sites, current and future pictures of provision and identifying key issues and findings.

**Stage D – Develop the Strategy.**
This includes developing recommendations and action plan(s) and writing and adopting the strategy.

**Stage E – Delivering the strategy and keeping it robust and up to date.**

4.7 The Wyre Playing Pitch Strategy sets out a framework for sports development over a 10 year period between 2014 and 2024, considering the following sports:

- football;
- cricket;
- rugby union;
- rugby league;
- hockey; and
- crown green bowls.

4.8 In doing so the PPS looks at pitches and associated facilities at primary and secondary schools and colleges as well privately owned sports clubs and public provision, including those pitches in Wyre Council and parish/town council ownership or lease.

4.9 Consultation was undertaken with representatives of Sport England and the National Governing Bodies (NGBs) for each sport with the exception of crown green bowls as an overall governing body could not be identified. All sports have club representation in the Wyre area with the exception of rugby league which was included because a club has operated at Fleetwood in the recent past.

4.10 Questionnaires were sent to local sports clubs and primary and secondary schools in order to obtain information in relation to the demand for use of pitches (and greens in the case of bowls) for these sports. Sport England considered that the rate of responses to club questionnaires was relatively good for the 5 NGB sports, ranging from 61.5% for cricket to 100% for rugby union but was at a lower level of 15% for bowls. There was also a good response rate from secondary schools.
but lower from primary schools, hence additional information was sought from those schools by telephone. The supply side was also taken into account by the consultant undertaking pitch, wicket and green inspections during the playing season of the particular sport.

4.11 The PPS considers each sport by the following eight sub-areas and is therefore consistent with the Green Infrastructure Strategy (GIS):

- Fleetwood;
- Thornton;
- Cleveleys;
- Poulton-le-Fylde;
- Rural Plain;
- Mosslands;
- Central Corridor; and
- Rural East and Uplands.

4.12 The GIS also included an additional area, the intertidal Wyre Sands. These areas closely align with the spatial character areas identified by the Wyre Core Strategy Preferred Options (2012) and are shown at page 10 of the Wyre Playing Pitch Strategy which is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

4.13 The PPS contains action plans corresponding to each of the above areas with short, medium and long term actions for each playing pitch location within the particular area. There is also an overall Wyre Strategy, a Planning and Investment Strategy as well as individual strategies for each sport. The PPS is supported by a separate set of technical appendices. The main findings and recommendations of the PPS are considered in the following section.

5. Key Issues and proposals

5.1 The Playing Pitch Strategy indicates that there is a general need to protect existing playing pitches with some key facilities such as council owned football pitches currently being overplayed. This means that the current usage of a pitch exceeds the recommended weekly carrying capacity, based on the quality of the pitch. There are no playing pitch standards (provision per head of population) in the PPS as Sport England has moved away from this approach so the various strategies and action plans enable delivery of recommendations. The document contains a large number of these so all cannot be covered by this report.

5.2 Importantly, the PPS recommends that Wyre Council identify and support 5 sites as ‘hubs’ of high quality pitches and changing facilities at the following locations:

- King George V Playing Fields (Broadwater), Fleetwood;
- Thornton Health and Fitness Centre (YMCA);
- Cottam Hall, Poulton-le-Fylde;
- Myerscough College; and
- Preesall Park.

5.3 The former three sites are in council ownership so partnership working with Myerscough College and Preesall Town Council (who have a lease of Preesall Park until 2017) would be required to deliver this recommendation. The PPS indicates that the establishment of a hub should address the following considerations:

- A standard of maintenance that enables the pitches to be played on at least twice a week without detrimental impact.
- Adequate changing facilities that are flexible, fully compliant with Disability Discrimination Act guidance, meet current Sport England and NGB standards and can be used by a number of groups at the same time.
- Managed community access and security of tenure for clubs who wish to be based at a site.
- Good access via public transport and car. Sufficient car and coach parking.
- Pitches that comply with current NGB specifications with regard to size and run off areas.

5.4 The PPS also undertook a quantitative assessment of future requirements for Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) which indicated at a simple analysis that Wyre currently requires an additional AGP. There are a significant percentage of residents using AGPs outside the borough. However, it is not known where in the borough those residents live or which borough AGP they are visiting. Further work would be required to establish whether a new AGP is needed to retain residents in Wyre and where that AGP should be located. Initial findings suggest that an AGP may be required in the borough but the type of surface would need further consideration as there is overall unmet demand for both football and hockey but hockey cannot be played on a 3G surface. Six AGPs were excluded from detailed analysis because they were either of small size or did not have community use. The Sport England analysis represents a snapshot in time and subsequently new facilities have been proposed at Poolfoot Farm, including additional AGPs, and delivered at Thornton Health and Fitness Centre.

5.5 In order to consider the future demand for pitches the PPS considers team generation rates (TGRs) based upon future sports participation and population alongside responses from clubs indicating their future plans for increasing teams. The latter is normally greater than the former due to aspirations of increased participation from the clubs; however the TGRs themselves indicate little change to existing demands. This means that with the exception of crown green bowls there is limited identified surplus pitch/ green capacity, however where the area action plans have identified such spare capacity, the PPS indicates that the Council should consider reviewing the status of the surplus pitches using the following hierarchy:
- Restructure to facilitate a different sporting use;
- Make available as open space, taking into account the Wyre GI Strategy; and
- If not required for either of the above, enter discussions with Sport England to consider its potential for development.

The main findings by sport are as follows:

**Football**

5.6 Football is a popular sport in Wyre with pitches being located across all 8 sub-areas. There is a greater reliance upon the use of council owned pitches by clubs than is the case for other sports, particularly King George V Playing Fields (Broadwater), Thornton Health and Fitness Centre (YMCA), the Civic Centre Playing Field and Cottam Hall. With the exception of Thornton YMCA all are currently being overplayed. The action plans therefore advocate improving the quality of pitches (including drainage and maintenance regimes) to increase their carrying capacity. There is a further recommendation to undertake a building survey of existing changing facilities at the Civic Centre and Cottam Hall with a view improving those facilities. Importantly the action plan for Thornton recognises the removal of pitches at Bourne Road South and the consequential need to review current provision at Bourne Road North in view of the loss of changing facilities on the southern site. This review would need to take account of the additional facilities proposed at Poolfoot Farm.

5.7 Football has the most potential for community usage of school pitches which could reduce overplay and training on existing non-school pitches therefore allowing additional recovery time for them. The football strategy recommends increasing dedicated 5v5, 7v7 and 9v9 pitches and in this respect the action plans propose the addition of a mini football pitch at the Civic Centre and the reinstatement of a mini pitch at Stalmine playing field. A detailed Investment Plan, supporting the PPS and facilitating future funding bids and prioritisation will be required.

**Cricket**

5.8 Cricket wickets/pitches are located across 6 of the sub-areas (Fleetwood, Thornton, Poulton-le-Fylde, Rural Plain, Central Corridor and Rural East and Uplands). The sport is less reliant upon council provision than football with the main council facility being Cottam Hall and a greater proportion of usage relating to wickets/pitches in private ownership. There is some overplay of wickets/pitches at Blackpool and Fylde Nautical Campus, Cottam Hall, Fylde Cricket Club and Thornton Cleveleys Cricket Club. Additionally, both Great Eccleston and Shireshead and Forton Cricket Clubs indicated requirements for additional provision to accommodate lower order (e.g. 3rd, 4th) teams.

**Rugby Union**

5.9 Rugby Union pitches are located across 6 of the sub-areas (Fleetwood, Thornton, Poulton-le-Fylde, Rural Plain, Central Corridor and Rural East and Uplands).
and Uplands). There is widespread overplay of pitches (50%) with a further 30% being played to at least capacity. Sites with surplus capacity are Rossall School (presently not available for community use) and Garstang Community Academy (drainage issues) which therefore indicates a serious problem in meeting demand in the area and the long term growth of the sport.

5.10 Recommendations include replacing the existing AGP at Fleetwood Rugby Club and improving the clubhouse and creating a new pitch and improving the existing clubhouse at Garstang Rugby Club. Furthermore, improving existing pitch quality and considering how/where training is undertaken could reduce pitch overplay.

Rugby League

5.11 There are currently no Rugby League teams within the Wyre area, however the PPS recommends that support be given to Fleetwood RUFC to re-establish a previously operating Rugby League team at the club.

Hockey

5.12 Hockey has specific pitch requirements as it is played on sand-based AGPs which means that there is only a single match sized dedicated facility for the sport within Wyre at Rossall School. This is used by Rossall Ladies Hockey Club but is otherwise in private use. Additionally, one Wyre based hockey club, Garstang, play outside the borough at Preston. The PPS recommends the development of a sand filled AGP for hockey within the borough with potential for such a facility at Garstang Community Academy.

Bowls

5.13 Bowls is played across all areas of Wyre with a mix of council and private owned facilities. There is widespread (83%) underplay of greens using the consultant’s method of assessment. Included in recommendations are reconfiguring greens at Marine Gardens, reviewing the level of provision at North Drive, Cleveleys in accordance with alternative facilities and improving ancillary facilities at Jean Stansfield Memorial Park. A significant proportion of facilities have recommendations to be protected/ maintained at current levels. There are concerns with this recommendation given the level of underplay identified.

Schools

5.14 Pitches are mostly provided for football and a small amount of underuse is identified on a number of these indicating some potential for future community use whilst there is greater underuse on cricket wickets/ pitches at schools. To utilise this for community use would require partnership working with the schools and Lancashire County Council.

Next Steps

5.15 If approved, the PPS will be used as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. It forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and will be used for making strategic
decisions on future playing pitch provision and management across the borough. The PPS is a living document that is intended to be kept up to date in accordance with stage E of the Sport England guidance (Deliver the strategy and keep it robust and up to date). Whilst this indicates that the PPS could be reviewed on an annual basis which should help to ensure that the original supply and demand information is no more than two years old, for the purposes of providing part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, it is intended that the PPS will only be reviewed or updated as is considered necessary to ensure that the Local Plan may be found sound at examination.

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<td>The total cost of the Wyre Green Infrastructure Study including Open Space Audit and Needs Assessment, Green Infrastructure Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy was £44,679 and the Playing Pitch Strategy can reasonably be considered to account for approximately a third of that cost. This cost was in the overall Local Plan budget and paid over the 2013/14 and 2014/15 financial years. Recommendations made in the PPS may be funded by developer contributions (Section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy), expanding upon community provision through the use of school facilities or joint bids to obtain external funding.</td>
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<td>The Wyre Playing Pitch Strategy will be a material consideration used to enable the determination of planning applications and/ or to provide appropriate pre-application advice. The Strategy is also a key part of the evidence base for the emerging Wyre Local Plan.</td>
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**Other risks/implications: checklist**

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with a x.

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List of appendices (not included in hard copies of the agenda)

Appendix 1: Wyre Playing Pitch Strategy

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