

Report title	Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Stephen Simkins Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration	
Originating services	Planning & Public Health Partnerships	
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Report to be/has been considered by	Regeneration Leadership Team City Housing and Environment Leadership Team Public Health Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board	3 October 2022 4 October 2022 4 October 2022 18 October 2022

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Adopt the City of Wolverhampton Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy and Action Plan (2022).
2. Delegate authority to the Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration, to agree the final version of the Overarching Strategic Framework for the Black Country (2022).

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. The supporting Wolverhampton Playing Pitch Assessment Report (2022).

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To seek approval to adopt an up-to-date City of Wolverhampton Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS) (Appendix 1) and to advise of the supporting Playing Pitch Assessment Report for Wolverhampton and the Overarching Strategic Framework for the Black Country (Appendices 2 and 3). The PPOSS will direct investment and planning decisions on playing pitches and outdoor sports across the city in future years, help the Council to secure external funding (including developer contributions) and release surplus assets to maximise local community and regeneration benefits.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Well managed and located playing pitches, outdoor sports facilities and other open spaces make a vital contribution to the quality of life and health of individuals, families and communities across Wolverhampton. The Council owns and manages a significant number of the playing pitches, outdoor sports facilities and other open space in the city, providing a range of recreational opportunities for sport, exercise, play, contact with nature and growing produce. A good quality network of playing pitches, outdoor sports facilities and open space is vital to help deliver the Council's Vision for Public Health 2030, the Wolverhampton Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2023, the Wolverhampton Health Inequalities Strategy 2021-2023 and the Our Council Plan 2019-24.
- 2.2 In 2016 Cabinet approved a new Playing Pitch Strategy (PSS) for Wolverhampton, which was updated in 2018. Both were produced by Knight Kavanagh Page (KKP) in line with Sport England requirements. An update of the complementary Open Space Strategy and Action Plan (OSSAP), also produced by KKP, was approved by Cabinet in 2018.
- 2.3 The PPS and OSSAP were produced with the intention that the strategies and action plans would be subject to regular review to ensure their relevance. A review of both is now due.
- 2.4 Both documents direct investment and planning decisions on the city's playing pitches, other outdoor sports facilities and wider open spaces. They also help the Council, sports clubs and other organisations to secure outside funding and to identify which assets are surplus and can be released for wider community and regeneration benefits.
- 2.5 Since 2018 Wolverhampton has experienced population and employment growth as well as the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The latter has highlighted the inequalities within our society in access to open space and has emphasised the importance of open spaces, including playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities, to health and wellbeing. These developments, plus future predictions of growth, are placing increased pressure on the city's playing pitches and open spaces.
- 2.6 A review of the OSSAP and the development of a Built Facilities Strategy and Action Plan are being undertaken and will be reported to Cabinet in due course. These studies are overseen by the Council's Open Space Steering Group which has representatives

from all relevant service areas within the Council. Wider work on increasing physical inactivity and on tackling health inequalities is also being undertaken, involving Public Health, the wider Council and Health and Wellbeing Together.

- 2.7 Paragraph 99 of the National Planning Policy Framework, 2021, states that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:
- A. An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
 - B. 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
 - C. The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.
- 2.8 Policy ENV6 of the Black Country Core Strategy (2011) states that developments that would reduce the overall value of the open space, sport and recreation network will be resisted and that each Local Authority will develop its own standards, policies and proposals for such facilities. The Wolverhampton Unitary Development Plan, 2006 offers, in policies R3 and R5, further protection from loss of open space, sport and recreation facilities unless it can be justified by a needs assessment.
- 2.9 An up-to-date PPOSS provides a robust needs assessment against which to assess development proposals, direct investment, manage outdoor sports facilities and seek funding.
- 2.10 In late 2020 it was agreed to carry out a joint review of the Playing Pitch strategies for the four Black Country Authorities. This would provide part of the evidence base for the emerging Black Country Plan and an opportunity to consider cross-boundary issues. The approach was supported by Sport England, Active Black Country and the National Governing Bodies of the main pitch based sports. KKP were appointed to carry out the four reviews and commenced work in April 2021. The commission included an Assessment report plus Strategy and Action Plan for each Black Country Authority plus an Overarching Strategic Framework for the Black Country to address Black Country-wide and cross-boundary issues. The Overarching Strategic Framework remains in draft pending agreement of the final wording in light of Dudley Council's decision to withdraw from the Black Country Plan. Cabinet is being asked to delegate approval to agree this Overarching Framework which will guide cross-boundary working but will not be formally adopted by the Council.
- 2.11 The recent decision by Dudley Council to withdraw from the Black Country Plan means that Wolverhampton will now produce its own plan. This does not, however, alter the need for the review; the revised Playing Pitch Strategy will instead form part of the evidence base for the new Wolverhampton Strategic Plan and the finalised Overarching

Strategic Framework for the Black Country will still identify cross-boundary issues and opportunities for joint working with other Black Country Authorities.

- 2.12 The Assessment Report, Strategy and Action Plan (the Study) consider provision for the following sports:
- A. Athletics
 - B. Bowls
 - C. Cricket
 - D. Cycling
 - E. Football (including 3G pitches)
 - F. Golf
 - G. Hockey
 - H. Netball
 - I. Rugby union (including 3G pitches)
 - J. Rugby league (including 3G pitches)
 - K. Tennis
 - L. Water sports
 - M. Other grass pitch sports where they occur (e.g. Gaelic football)
- 2.13 The Study identifies current levels of provision in the city, split across the public, education, voluntary and commercial sectors, and compares them with likely future levels of demand.
- 2.14 As part of the Study, consultation was carried out with Sport England, Active Black Country, sports clubs and National Governing Bodies of sport.
- 2.15 Pitch assessments were undertaken using a variety of methods including site visits, non-technical assessments and user feedback. Pitch quality influences the carrying capacity of a site; for example poor drainage and poor maintenance may lead to a pitch being assessed as poor, thereby limiting the number of games that can be played.
- 2.16 The key objectives of the study for City of Wolverhampton are to ensure the provision of a range of good quality and accessible outdoor sports facilities which:
- A. Meet the needs of the city;
 - B. Maximise the strengths of the voluntary sports sector;
 - C. Support an increase in sport participation and physical activity; and
 - D. Contribute to an overall increase in health and wellbeing across the city.

3.0 Aims, Key Findings and Recommendations

3.1 The PPOSS contains the following vision: 'Provide a network of good quality outdoor sports provision to increase participation and promote a healthier lifestyle for all participants.'

3.2 Its aims and strategic recommendations are as follows:

AIM 1

To **protect** the existing supply of outdoor sport facilities where it is needed for meeting current and future needs.

Recommendations:

- a. Ensure, through the use of the PPOSS, that outdoor sport facilities are protected through the implementation of local planning policy.
- b. Secure tenure and access to sites for high quality, development minded clubs, through a range of solutions and partnership agreements.
- c. Maximise community use of education facilities where needed.

AIM 2

To **enhance** outdoor sport facilities and ancillary facilities through improving quality and management of sites.

Recommendations:

- d. Maintain quality and seek improvements where necessary.
- e. Adopt a tiered approach (hierarchy of provision) to the management and improvement of sites.
- f. Work in partnership with stakeholders to secure funding
- g. Secure developer contributions.

AIM 3

To **provide** new outdoor sport facilities where there is current or future demand to do so.

Recommendations:

- h. Rectify quantitative shortfalls through the current stock.
- i. Identify opportunities to add to the overall stock to accommodate both current and future demand.

3.3 The headline findings from the Assessment Report, and from the Action Plan which shows how these recommendations can best be delivered, are outlined below for each sport studied.

Football (including 3G pitches)

- 3.4 There are 203 grass football pitches in Wolverhampton across 106 sites, with 137 pitches available at some level for community use across 58 sites. Of those available for community use, 57 are assessed as poor quality, 65 as standard quality and just 15 as good.
- 3.5 There is a current shortfall of capacity on grass pitches to accommodate adult football matches, which will be exacerbated in the future. This is a change from the previous Playing Pitch Strategy due to a more robust method of assessing pitch quality. There is some current capacity on youth pitches which continues in the future for all but youth 11v11 pitches. The shortfall is not distributed evenly across the city and can be accommodated by: pitch improvements to increase capacity; pitch reconfiguration; negotiating community use of currently closed sites and reinstating currently disused pitches. Future demand can therefore be met by better management of existing pitches rather than the provision of new pitches.
- 3.6 There are four full-sized floodlit third generation turf (3G) pitches in Wolverhampton plus eight smaller pitches. Not all are available for community use. All pitches available for community use are at capacity and used for football. There is an identified existing shortfall which will increase to 4.5 pitches due to future demand, with some interest in developing 3G pitches from existing community providers such as Bilston Town FC.

Cricket

- 3.7 There are 13 grass cricket squares in Wolverhampton, with 11 available for community use. In addition there are 15 standalone non turf wicket pitches. There is a current and future shortfall of provision for Saturday cricket but spare capacity for Sunday and midweek cricket. Some issues of overplay can be addressed through improved maintenance although there remains a shortfall of supply for Saturday peak time cricket.

Rugby (including 3G pitches)

- 3.8 There are 11 grass rugby union pitches across the city; six senior, three junior and two mini pitches. Eight of these pitches are assessed as poor quality with the two assessed as standard and one as good being located at Wolverhampton Rugby Club. Overall there is a current and future shortfall of rugby union pitches. This can largely be accommodated by improving pitch quality and floodlighting at Wolverhampton Rugby Club.
- 3.9 There are no rugby league pitches in Wolverhampton and no identified demand since Wolverhampton RLFC folded.

Hockey

- 3.10 There are five full size artificial grass pitches in the city which are suitable for hockey. All are floodlit and available for the community. Provided they are protected for hockey they can meet demand.

Tennis

- 3.11 There are 125 tennis courts in Wolverhampton across 28 sites. Club sites are adequate to meet their own demand and public courts can be improved to meet demand for informal play. Use of public courts in parks is more common in Wolverhampton than in other local authorities.

Netball

- 3.12 There is a large supply of 69 outdoor netball courts in the city which is considered adequate to meet demand.

Bowls

- 3.13 There are 21 crown green bowling greens in Wolverhampton, across 18 sites, the majority of which are good quality. These are considered adequate to meet existing and future demand.

Cycling and Athletics

- 3.14 Cycling and athletic tracks are adequate to meet existing and future demand provided the facilities at WV Active are maintained and improved as required.

Golf

- 3.15 Supply of golf clubs, both within and outside Wolverhampton, is adequate to meet demand provided provision within the city is protected.

Water Sports

- 3.16 Despite not having a large outdoor water sports facility, Wolverhampton has three active clubs whose needs are met by use of canals and nearby facilities outside the city boundary.

Other Grass Sports

- 3.17 There are no facilities or identified demand for American football provision within the city. Baseball provision at Colton Hills School requires protection. The existing Gaelic football provision at Aldersley School requires improving with long term aspirations for a dedicated home venue.

Conclusions

- 3.18 Although there are some shortfalls in provision of pitches for football, cricket and rugby union, these are limited and can largely be met by improvement of existing facilities, including the provision of a small number of new 3G pitches. This puts Wolverhampton in a good position relative to some other Black Country Authorities. Wolverhampton is helped by having facilities in South Staffordshire, outside but adjacent to the boundary, in football, cricket, rugby union and golf, which complement facilities within the city.

- 3.19 The priority actions in the Action Plan tie in well with existing projects such as: the development of the former Wolverhampton United FC ground by New Park Village FC; planned developments at Bilston Town FC.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 Option 1 was to not carry out the Study. This would have left the Council without current information with which to inform decisions on disposal, investment in and management of outdoor sports facilities. It would also have not met the Council's obligations under national and local planning policy and guidance.
- 4.2 Option 2 was to carry on the Study for Wolverhampton only. This would have provided a less robust evidence base to support local decision making and would not have addressed potential cross-boundary issues with other Black Country Authorities.
- 4.3 Option 3 was to carry out a Black Country-wide Study as outlined. This provides a robust evidence base for joint working and identifies cross-boundary issues where collaboration between Black Country Authorities could better meet identified demand.

5.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 5.1 The reason for the decision is to allow the Strategy and Action Plan to be used as a basis for decision-making on investment in, management of and potential disposal of outdoor sports facilities. If Cabinet do not approve the adoption of the PPOSS, the Council will not have an approved accurate and up to date evidence base and action plan to inform decisions. It will not be compliant with national planning guidance and local planning policy and will not have an evidence base for applications for external funding.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no immediate financial implications for the Council from this report.
- 6.2 The Action Plan contains recommended priorities for action. The PPOSS is, however, a strategic document intended to inform disposal, management and investment decisions by the Council and external partners. Any projects which fall under Council responsibilities will follow the appropriate governance procedure for approval on an individual basis.
- 6.3 The information contained in the PPOSS will be used to inform future requests for planning contributions and funding applications by the Council and its partners.
[MH/290922/I]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from the report, however Sport England recommends that Local Authorities should have a Playing Pitch strategy in place.
[TC/28092022/A]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 Considering equalities is a mandatory requirement in any decision. The Study aims to reduce inequalities in access to quality playing pitches and other outdoor sports facilities both at a spatial level across the city and for different social groups. For example it identifies opportunities to increase women's and girls' participation in sports. The PPOSS is therefore intended to have an overall positive effect on the city's residents, employees and visitors. All organisations involved with playing pitches within the identified sports were consulted. City of Wolverhampton Council, Sport England, Active Black Country and the National Governing Bodies of the sport studied all have a commitment to promoting equalities in their funding and sport development programmes.
- 8.2 Individual projects identified in the Action Plan will be assessed for their equalities implications as part of their detailed project development. This will include consultation with relevant groups, where appropriate.

9.0 All other implications

- 9.1 The PPOSS has considered, as part of its scope, the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on demand for outdoor sports facilities.
- 9.2 The Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan is intended to protect, maintain and improve the provision of outdoor sports facilities across the city and to increase sport participation. It is therefore intended to improve health and wellbeing within the city.
- 9.3 The PPOSS is a strategic document intended to inform disposal, management and investment decisions by the Council and external partners. The implications of any projects which it is proposed to pursue for asset management will be addressed on an individual basis as they are developed.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

- 10.1 None.

11.0 Appendices

- 11.1 Appendix 1: Wolverhampton Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy and Action Plan
- 11.2 Appendix 2a and 2b: Wolverhampton Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy Assessment Report
- 11.3 Appendix 3: Black Country Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy Overarching Strategic Framework