

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGENERATION**

**MID DEVON PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY**

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Graeme Barnell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

**Responsible Officer:** Mrs Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration

**Reason for Report:** To seek Cabinet approval for officers to prepare a Playing Pitch Strategy for Mid Devon, using external consultant support where this is necessary.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**That Cabinet approves:**

- 1. The preparation of a Playing Pitch Strategy for Mid Devon**
- 2. The use of external consultant support to help the preparation of the Playing Pitch Strategy**

**Financial Implications:** It is anticipated that external consultant support will cost between £12,000 and £30,000 depending on the type of support that will be needed. This is currently being evaluated as part of detailed project planning. There is funding provision within the budget for the next review of the Local Plan for technical studies and new evidence and this falls within the scope of that work.

**Legal implications:** None as a result of this report, but it is to be noted that the Playing Pitch Strategy will ultimately require Cabinet approval for adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

**Risk Assessment:** The Playing Pitch Strategy will provide robust evidence that can be used to inform the preparation of development plans, masterplans and other plans, programmes and strategies. It can also be used to inform the Council's decisions made on planning applications submitted for determination.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** An up to date Playing Pitch Strategy can be used to help guide and inform decisions taken for the provision of sports pitches across the district that can be used by the whole community. It will not in itself lead to any impacts on the equality strands protected under the Equality Act 2010 (the 'protected characteristics'). The preparation of the Playing Pitch Strategy will be subject to community engagement at key stages.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** Preparation of the Playing Pitch Strategy will help the Council's Priority 3: Community, since it can be used to help support the development of sports facilities that will benefit the district, and which can promote physical activity, health and well-being.

**Impact on Climate Change:** The Playing Pitch Strategy will not have any direct impact on climate change.

## **1.0 Introduction/Background**

- 1.1 A new 'Playing Pitch Strategy' is needed for Mid Devon that is consistent with Sport England's guidance. Sport England will need to be satisfied that the strategy has been prepared in accordance with their requirements and is therefore 'fit for purpose'.
- 1.3 A 'Playing Fields Strategy' for Mid Devon was published in 2010, originally as a requirement for the (now defunct) Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. An Open Space and Play Area Strategy was published in 2014, in part to support the evidence base for the planning policies contained within the emerging Local Plan Review. The scope of this study encompassed playing pitches but also looked more widely at the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space in general, including parks, play areas and other public open space. There is now a need for updated evidence and information specifically on the supply of and demand for playing pitches across Mid Devon district. This will help ensure that there is a good supply of high quality playing pitch facilities across the district to meet the sporting needs of local communities.
- 1.4 The Mid Devon Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) will become part of an evidence base which will be used to help inform future strategic plan-making for the district. The PPS will also help to provide an early understanding of existing and future need for sports pitch provision in the Culm Valley area to the east of the district, encompassing the market town of Cullompton and the proposed Culm Garden Village. The findings of the PPS will be used to help shape masterplanning that is currently in progress for the Culm Garden Village.
- 1.5 In addition, the PPS will have a wider role, supporting work across the Council's service areas and external organisations with an interest in playing pitch provision within Mid Devon. In particular it will:
  - Provide evidence that can be used to help inform planning applications submitted to the Council for determination and decisions made on these.
  - Be used by the Council to help inform the management of playing pitch assets for which it has responsibility.
  - Be used by private and third sector providers of playing pitches, and support local sports clubs and organisations, in making bids for funding from a variety of sources to maintain and improve provision.

## **2.0 Management and delivery of the strategy**

- 2.1 It is anticipated that the main stages will be completed as follows (this approach follows the stages set out in the Sport England guidance):
  - Stage A (Prepare and tailor approach): June 2019 – August 2019  
**COMPLETED**

- Stage B (Gather supply and demand data): August 2019 – May 2020
- Stage C (Assess supply and demand data): May 2020 – October 2020
- Stage D (Develop the strategy): October 2020 – February 2021
- Stage E (Deliver the strategy): February 2021 – ongoing.

Within this programme, there will be an early focus for the Culm Valley area, with the intention that key stages will be completed in the winter 2019/2020 to help inform masterplanning work for the Culm Garden Village and the planning of road improvements at Cullompton.

- 2.2 A partnership approach to the development of the Playing Pitch Strategy has been established which brings together Mid Devon District and Devon County Council officers, MDDC Council members, Sport England and representatives from National Game Boards (NGBs) for the major pitch sports played in the district. An initial scoping meeting was held on 12th June 2019 at which the project steering group was established. The requirements for 'Stage A' of Sport England's PPS guidance were discussed and worked through at the scoping meeting; subsequent work has been undertaken to address issues that still needed attention before 'Stage B' (gathering supply and demand information) can begin. Completion of 'Stage A' has ensured that the approach to developing the PPS to meet the specific requirements of the study area (Mid Devon) has been prepared.
- 2.3 The project team will include an external consultant with project management provided by officers from Mid Devon District Council forward planning team.
- 2.4 The data gathering (Stage B) is to be completed in-house by the Council, as far as possible, in conjunction with NGBs. The role of the external consultant will be primarily to carry out the assessment and analysis required for Stage C and working with the project team to develop the strategy at Stage D. Some elements of Stage B may require consultant support, particularly where specialist knowledge and skills are needed. It will be the responsibility of the project steering group to ensure that the PPS is delivered appropriately and kept robust and up to date (Stage E).
- 2.5 Work at Stage A has established the scope of the study, including the sports to include in the strategy. The sports proposed for inclusion are as follows: football, cricket, rugby union and hockey.
- 2.6 Key outputs from the work will include:
  - A report within which playing pitch supply, demand and assessment information is collated and presented.
  - A strategy document with clear sport, study area, sub-area and site specific recommendations alongside a prioritised action plan.

### **3.0 Justification for use of external consultant**

- 3.1 The Council has sought to reduce the cost of preparing the PPS with the intention to carry out as much of the initial data gathering (pitch supply and demand information) as possible in-house, in conjunction with NGBs. Existing information will be used where available.
- 3.2 The Council does not have the specialist skills and resources required in-house to thoroughly carry out the data assessment stage (Stage C) in accordance with the Sport England guidance. It is therefore recommended to use a suitable external consultant to carry out the assessment and analysis required for Stage C and developing the strategy at Stage D. The consultant may also be needed for certain elements of data gathering (Stage B), particularly where specialist pitch assessments are required. The consultant would work alongside MDDC officers as part of the project delivery team and be required to deliver the key outputs set out above (assessment report and assist with the strategy document). Throughout the process, the work will be overseen by the project steering group.
- 3.3 Officers therefore seek approval for the commissioning of the strategy which is seen as a key piece of evidence going forward and will also inform strategic projects in and around Cullompton. Officers also seek approval for external consultant support to help the preparation of the Mid Devon Playing Pitch Strategy.

#### **Contacts for more Information:**

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**Circulation of the Report:** Cabinet Member seen and approved [yes/no – name of Cabinet Member], Leadership Team seen and approved [yes/no]

#### **List of Background Papers:**

<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-and-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-for-sport-guidance/>