

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 14 October 2019

Wards: All

Subject: Merton's Playing Pitch Strategy 2019

Lead officer: Chris Lee, Director for Environment and Regeneration

Lead members: Councillor Martin Whelton, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport
Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture

Contact officers: Tara Butler, Deputy Head of Future Merton
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Recommendation:

That Cabinet adopt Merton's Playing Pitch Strategy (2019), which will form part of the evidence base for the Council's new Local Development Plan.

1. Purpose of report and executive summary

- 1.1 The Council's current Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) was published in June 2011. Since then, there have been changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), planning legislation and updates to the predicted population growth for Merton, resulting in the need for a revised PPS for the borough.
- 1.2 The PPS is a strategic assessment that provides an up to date analysis of supply and demand for outdoor grass and artificial playing pitches in the borough. The report includes an analysis of all Council and privately owned sites where the following sports are played; cricket, rugby union, football, hockey, tennis, bowls, athletics and water sports.
- 1.3 The PPS identifies how playing pitches are currently used, whether any pitches are surplus to requirements and sets out how the Council, its partners and developers can plan provision to meet the current and future demand for outdoor sport and recreation facilities.

- 1.4 The PPS is required by the Council to ensure a planned approach to outdoor sport and physical activity facilities in the borough over the medium term ensuring that residents continue to have access to high quality facilities, helping to meet the priorities set out in the Council's Health & Wellbeing Strategy.
- 1.5 Furthermore, the PPS enables the National Sports Governing Bodies, such as the England Cricket Board (ECB), Rugby Football Union (RFU), Football Foundation and England Hockey to apply for substantial funding in conjunction with Sport England to enable investment in sporting facilities throughout Merton. Without an adopted PPS, this is very difficult, and the quality and availability of sporting facilities throughout the borough could suffer.
- 1.6 On the 12th September 2019, the Borough Plan Advisory Committee recommended that the PPS should be adopted by Cabinet.

2. Details

- 2.1 In January 2018, officers tendered for consultants via the London Tenders Portal to produce a new PPS on behalf of the Council. 4global Consulting was appointed through this process. The strategy was developed in partnership with Sport England and the National Governing Bodies for Rugby, Cricket, Hockey, Football and Tennis; and the Council's Leisure, Public Health and Future Merton teams.
- 2.2 The PPS:
- Acts as evidence for the new Local Development Plan, informs the development of planning policy and the protection of playing pitches.
 - Assists with development management decisions for planning applications involving new, improvements to, or the loss of playing fields.
 - Supports the need for financial contributions such as Section 106, from developers to meet infrastructure requirements relating to sport, recreation and open space.
 - Identifies where improvements and enhancements need to be made to existing facilities across the borough.
 - Identifies any social, physical and affordability barriers of existing and new pitches to enable increased activity and participation for all ages, groups and communities.

- Builds on the borough's priorities for community cohesion, accessibility and social inclusion.
- Supports the borough's Health and Wellbeing priorities as set out in Merton's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- Highlights the key priorities in the borough and provides up to date evidence to support funding bids to National Sports bodies like Sport England, the National Governing Bodies of sport and the Mayor of London.

2.3 The strategy was prepared by 4global Consulting in accordance with the Sport England methodology, which identifies four primary stages to preparing a PPS:

Stage A: Prepare and tailor the approach, agree timeline and set up the Steering Group;

Stage B: Gather supply and demand data for the sites and undertake detailed site quality assessments;

Stage C: Through analysis of the supply and demand information captured, identify the key issues; and

Stage D: Develop the action plan and recommendations to produce the Playing Pitch Strategy.

Once the PPS has been adopted, Sport England identify a further Stage E which is to deliver the strategy.

3. Alternative options

3.1 The alternative option would be not to adopt the PPS. This is not recommended as Sport England and other bodies responsible for grant funding would expect to see a strategic plan adopted to enable any funding bids or significant changes to facilities to move forward. As mentioned above, an adopted PPS is also key to future planning decisions in the borough and required as part of the Local Development Plan evidence base.

4. Consultation undertaken or proposed

4.1 As part of the Stage B process, 4global carried out stakeholder consultations with the relevant sport's National Governing Bodies and

Sport England, through detailed individual conversations in addition to the regular Steering Group meetings. Sporting clubs, leagues and schools throughout the borough were also consulted during the site quality audits and demand data capture. The consultation methods that were used included face to face meetings, focus groups, phone conversations and use of the 4global playing pitch online platform.

- 4.2 No further consultations are proposed for this strategy, however the PPS will form part of the suite of evidence base documents that will be published and consulted on through the Local Development Plan process.

5. Timetable

- 5.1 The PPS was considered by the Borough Plan Advisory Committee on 12th September 2019, where a recommendation was made that Cabinet adopt the strategy.
- 5.2 The PPS is to be considered by Cabinet for adoption on 14th October 2019.
- 5.3 Once adopted, the PPS can be implemented and used to inform the draft Local Development Plan and future planning applications on applicable sites throughout the borough.

6. Financial, resource and property implications

- 6.1 The PPS advises that the Steering Group, which is made up of Sport England, representatives of each of the national sporting bodies and Council officers, meet regularly to ensure decisions are made in accordance with the action plan and priority sites outlined in the PPS.
- 6.2 The PPS recognises the financial pressures facing the Council and does not identify the Council as a key financial resource for the delivery of the strategy. While it is acknowledged that the Council, as a landowner, has an existing interest in sporting projects that will be delivered on Council owned land, the PPS identifies that where sports clubs have a long standing interest in a specific site they will be a partner in delivering the actions and contribute financially or in-kind, alongside their sporting bodies, where appropriate.
- 6.3 The recommendations and action plan within the PPS will greatly assist the Council's Development Control team in securing Section 106 financial

planning contributions from planning applications, which will improve the quality and quantity of sporting facilities throughout the borough.

- 6.4 The costs for the preparation of this strategy fall within the existing Local Development Plan budget and existing Future Merton and Leisure staff resource time.

7. Legal and statutory implications

- 7.1 There is no statutory requirement for the Council to have a PPS, however once adopted, it may be taken into account as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications where relevant, and can inform the future development of planning policy. The PPS also accords with paragraph 96 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 states that:

“Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate”

- 7.2 The PPS is a key evidence document that informs the development of the Local Development Plan and key evidence document for the Planning Inspector to consider at the Local Development Plan examination.
- 7.3 The successful delivery of the PSS is likely to rely on the provision of external funding to cover the cost associated with sports facility improvement and management. As described in paragraph 1.5 of this report, these funds are often sourced or matched from external grant funders such as Lottery or Sport England and sport governing bodies such as the Football Foundation, which involves the preparation of grant application forms. These are often extensive documents which are time consuming to prepare. Grant funding received is usually subject to legal agreements relating to future use of sport facilities which have benefitted from such grants, including maintenance obligations, restrictions on disposal and clawback should sporting activity subsequently cease to take place on site. Legal support should be sought prior to entering into such agreements.

7.4 As outlined at paragraphs 2.2 and 6.3 of this report, external funding relied upon is also likely to be via s106 agreements being more focused on recreational facilities. Members will however be aware of national changes to s.106 agreements and how funds can be allocated.

8. Human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications

8.1 No implications.

9. Risk management and health and safety implications

9.1 No implications

10. Appendices – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

10.1 No appendices

10.2 The Playing Pitch Strategy is available to view on the [Council's Local Development Plan Research webpage](#).