

**TITLE OF REPORT: Gateshead Council Playing Pitch Strategy 2024-2030****REPORT OF: Anneliese Hutchinson, Interim Strategic Director, Economy, Innovation and Growth, Kevin Scarlett, Interim Strategic Director, Housing Environment and Healthy Communities and Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform and seek approval from Cabinet for Gateshead Council's Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS).

**Background**

2. Gateshead has a strong sporting heritage. The Council wants there to be accessible, high quality and sustainable network of playing pitches that provides an opportunity for residents of Gateshead to play pitch sports. The network will cater for all standards of play from grassroots to elite. This will enable the inactive to become active, increase participation levels and help improve the health and well-being of all of our residents. It will also set out aspirations and potential opportunities to help shape longer-term plans and provisions in order to work towards the Borough's strategic vision.
3. The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) has been prepared to provide information on needs and opportunities for provision of sports pitches in Gateshead. This document will provide part of the evidence base for Gateshead's Local Plan and must be considered in making planning decisions affecting playing pitches and will be used by the Council and Partners to inform future initiatives and investment and may provide key evidence in future funding bids.
4. In 2016 Gateshead published a Playing Pitch Strategy. In order to ensure that information on provision and use of all playing pitch space is up to date, and to comply with Sport England's requirements for undertaking needs assessments for sports pitches, the Council has prepared a new PPS. The Playing Pitch Strategy comprises the Assessment Report and an Action Plan.
5. FMG Consultancy were commissioned to assist in the preparation of the PPS. FMG have extensive experience of preparing sport and leisure documents for public sector clients and supported Sport England in developing the PPS methodology.
6. The strategy has been developed in accordance with Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy guidance. It provides information on the supply and demand for

outdoor playing pitches within the Borough, covering the public, private, educational, voluntary and commercial sectors.

7. The PPS has demonstrated that playing field and outdoor sports facilities in Gateshead cannot be deemed surplus to requirements, due to evidenced shortfalls, now and in the future. Therefore, provision should be protected unless it can be replaced on a like for like basis.
8. The information contained within the PPS sets out clear priorities for sport in Gateshead, including:
  - Providing evidence to support management and investment decisions
  - Supporting Gateshead's Local Plan
  - Providing an evidence base to protect existing sports provision and ensure that future demand can also be catered for
  - Providing planning guidance in relation to pitch provision and quality standards
  - Informing the allocation of s106 funding and other funding streams
  - Helping to advance collaborative working with stakeholders
9. Gateshead has faced increasing pressure on its budgets which have been reduced by 56%.(Between when and when??) In response to these challenges, Gateshead Council has considered and undertaken some significant changes to enable it to continue to balance the budget and meet the needs of its residents.
10. As part of the 2019/20 budget setting process the budget consultation included a proposal to remove the maintenance of Council maintained bowling greens and some sports pitches across the Borough. Following consultation, the saving was agreed upon, and reserve mitigation funding was approved for a period of 3 years to allow time to implement a strategy of community asset transfer (CAT). This process was interrupted by the global pandemic, but the 3-year period of continued maintenance has now ended. Budgeted maintenance arrangements of bowling greens ceased at the end of March 2022 and the maintenance of the football pitches at the end of May 2022 but because of the pandemic community asset transfers had not progressed as swiftly as had been hoped. The new playing pitch strategy provides an opportunity to reset and renew discussions to enable a programme of asset transfers to continue.

## Proposal

11. It is proposed that Cabinet approves the findings and recommendations of the Playing Pitch Strategy (a summary of findings and recommendations is provided in Appendix 2).
12. Cabinet approval of these documents will allow the Council to implement their findings through collaborative work with local sports clubs, facilities providers, and sports' national governing bodies. Formal approval of the PPS will also provide Sport England with assurance that the Council's activities in exploring mechanisms for the provision and maintenance of sports facilities are compatible with Sport England's policy approach and will continue to support sporting activity in the Borough. Such mechanisms for the provision and maintenance of sites and facilities will include developing partnerships, lease agreements and asset transfer arrangements with sustainable, development-minded clubs and organisations to manage their own sites and / or facilities.
13. Some funding will be required to enable this transition to continue and this will be considered in the context of budget setting. It will be heavily reliant on local sports clubs taking on management of Council sites and attracting external funding to deliver enhancements.

## Recommendations

14. It is recommended that

- i. Cabinet approves the Gateshead Playing Pitch Strategy 2024-2030
- ii. Cabinet notes the need for transitional arrangements and funding whilst community asset transfers of further pitches is progressed
- iii. Cabinet notes the strategic recommendations and actions outlined in the Playing Pitch Strategy, including the setting up of a steering group to work together to help deliver these actions

for the following reason(s)

- a) Evidence within the PPS will be necessary to provide a valid assessment of provision to underpin future proposals relating to sports facilities.
- b) The PPS has the potential to support funding proposals to Sport England and national governing bodies of sport.
- c) Implementation of the recommendations of the PPS will assist the Council in supporting the management of sports facilities more efficient.

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## **Background Papers**

- PPS Assessment Report
- PPS Action Plan
  - Appendix A - Funding Plan
  - Appendix B - Stage E Checklist
  - Appendix C - Glossary of Terms

### Policy Context

1. The Playing Pitch Strategy supports the overall vision for Making Gateshead a Place where People Thrive and contributes to the delivery of many policy commitments within the Corporate Plan, Thrive and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, in particular the policy objective to create and develop healthy and sustainable places.
2. A women and health inequalities report [Mind the Gap: women and health inequalities \(2022\) - Gateshead Council](#) references recommendations to ensure that there is a gender balance, it identifies that we should adapt our physical activity offer to meet the needs of our people, incorporating activities and providing opportunities to enable a more inclusive sporting environment for girls and women across Gateshead.

### Playing Pitch Strategy Policy Context

1. A vision for the PPS has been developed by the steering group and sets out what is trying to be achieved and why.

‘For there to be accessible, high quality and sustainable network of playing pitches that provides an opportunity for residents of Gateshead to play pitch sports. The network will cater for all standards of play from grassroots to elite. This will enable the inactive to become active, increase participation levels and help improve the health and well-being of all of our residents. It will also set out aspirations and potential opportunities to help shape longer-term plans and provisions in order to work towards the Borough’s strategic vision:

“Making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives.’ Delivering these desired outcomes will help drive forward the ‘Thrive’ strategic approach and support the delivery of the Council’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Physical Activity Strategy. The new PPS will also provide an evidence base to inform the Local Plan review.

2. In 2023 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published a new national strategy for sport: Get Active – A strategy for the future of sport and physical activity. This new strategy builds on the foundations of the 2015 government sport strategy, Sporting Future: A New Strategy for a More Active Nation. It set out five outcomes delivered by sport and physical activity and these remain at the core of 2023 strategy:
  - Physical wellbeing
  - Mental wellbeing
  - Individual development
  - Social and community development

- Sustainable economic development
3. Get Active sets out how the government will work with the sector to help build a healthier nation by tackling high levels of inactivity, and by making sure that the sport and physical activity sector thrives for future generations.
  4. Central to this will be a focus on establishing a lifetime habit of being physically active amongst children and young people, including playing sport, supporting the sector to be welcoming to all, and ensuring the sector is prepared for both future challenges and opportunities.
  5. The 3 core priorities of the strategy are:
    - Ensuring everyone is focused on increasing physical activity, meaning fewer inactive children, and narrowing the gap on inactivity where groups are not being reached, with visible progress across the country by 2030.
    - Making sport and physical activity more inclusive and welcoming for all so that everyone can have confidence that there is a place for them in sport.
    - Moving towards a more sustainable sector that is more financially resilient and robust.
  6. Delivering against these priorities will help create a more active nation and a more sustainable sport sector.
  7. Sport England's strategy Uniting the Movement: A 10 year vision to transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity will focus on three objectives:
    1. Advocating for movement, sport and physical activity
    2. Joining forces on 5 big issues
      - Recover and reinvent
      - Connecting Communities
      - Positive experiences for children and young people
      - Connecting with health and wellbeing
      - Active environments
    3. Catalysts for Change

## **Background**

1. Gateshead has a rich sporting heritage which can make a profound and positive impact on Individuals, communities and wider lives. We know that being physically active can give a huge boost to our health it can reduce the

risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 30-40% and can reduce the risk of a range of medical conditions, including cancer, dementia, strokes, heart disease and depression. It can also lead to improvements in strength, balance, movement and motor skills, and help in maintaining a healthy body weight.

2. Other physical wellbeing outcomes backed by evidence include improved quality of sleep, increased energy levels, healthy early years development, reduced unhealthy behaviours like smoking, reduced mortality, effective pain management and improved quality of life in ageing.
3. Sport also makes a significant contribution to the UK economy. Statistics published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport estimate that the sport sector contributed £18.1bn to the economy in 2022—0.8% of total economic activity—supporting around 550,000 jobs. From 2010 to 2022 the sector grew by 32.2%, outpacing the rate of growth in the economy more broadly (21.5%).
4. As well as directly contributing to the economy, sport also provides indirect economic benefits. For example, a healthier population helps reduce costs for the healthcare system. Research conducted by the Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) at Sheffield Hallam University for Sport England estimated the value of sport in terms of preventing a number of serious physical and mental health conditions to be around £9.5bn.
5. Given the current financial situation within the Council, which has resulted in them ceasing to maintain sports pitches in the Borough, the PPS will be heavily reliant on working collaboratively with local stakeholders to identify opportunities to address the issues identified in the strategy. This will also be heavily reliant of local sports clubs taking on management of Council sites and attracting external funding to deliver enhancements. Whilst the Council are making every effort to identify sufficient resources to help deliver the strategy, at present this is extremely limited.

### **Purpose of the Playing Pitch Strategy**

1. The purpose of the playing pitch strategy is to set clear priorities for sport in Gateshead, including:
  - Providing evidence to support management and investment decisions
  - Support Gateshead's Local Plan
  - Provide an evidence base to protect existing sports provision and ensure that future demand can also be catered for
  - Provide planning guidance in relation to pitch provision and quality standards

- Inform the allocation of s106 funding and other funding streams
  - Help to advance collaborative working with stakeholders
2. Gateshead's PPS has been prepared by consultants FMG. The strategy has been developed with input from a steering group featuring representatives from Council services (including Spatial Planning and Environment, Asset Management, Sport and Public Health and Wellbeing), Sport England, and national governing bodies of sport. Local sports clubs have been consulted as part of the assessment process and have contributed to the strategies' understanding of the quality of facilities. An interactive map will be prepared to spatially identify the quantity and supply of playing fields and pitches across the borough.
  3. Appendix 2 of this report provides an overview of the key findings of the PPS, however the following key strategic objectives are identified:
    - Secure, protect and enhance the current provision where it is needed for meeting current or future needs.
    - Enhance playing fields, pitches and ancillary facilities through improving management of sites.
    - Identify key strategic playing pitch sites for improvement, development and investment.
    - Increase the provision of 3G pitches in Gateshead to meet training and competitive demand for football and rugby.
    - Gateshead International Stadium's role as an integral sporting and cultural hub has been highlighted with an aim to provide, protect and enhance provision.
    - Further develop partnerships, lease agreements and asset transfer arrangements with sustainable, development-minded clubs to manage their own sites and / or facilities. The aim is to improve quality and potentially access funding sources not currently available to the Council.

### **Keeping the strategy robust and up to date**

1. It is important that the PPS is used in a practical manner, is engaged with partners and encourages partnerships to be developed. The creation of this document should be regarded as part of the planning process and provide a framework for the future provision of playing pitches within the Borough.
2. The strategy has been developed in conjunction with the PPS steering group to assess the supply and demand of pitch provision within Gateshead and identify where shortfalls exist and how these can be met. It is important that the steering group now remains in place beyond completion of this strategy, to ensure that it is kept up to date.
3. It is recommended that the steering group meets at least once a year to update the supply and demand data and review delivery of any projects



identified within the action plan. As a guide, if no review and subsequent update has been carried out within three years of the PPS being signed off by the steering group, then Sport England and National Governing Bodies (NGBs) would consider the PPS and the information within it to be out of date. If the PPS is regularly reviewed and kept up to date it can remain valid for five years. It is recommended that the review process consider the following as a minimum:

- Recommendations that have been actioned since the strategy was signed off;
  - Any known changes in demand;
  - Any known changes to the supply of pitch provision;
  - Any known changes in pitch quality that can be benchmarked, i.e. through the PitchPower app; and
  - Any changes in circumstances or new issues that have come to light since the strategy was adopted. For example, new housing developments, S106 contributions or club ambitions.
1. It is the responsibility of the Council to coordinate the review meetings, with support from steering group members. If any members leave the steering group, it is that organisation's responsibility to ensure an adequate replacement is provided.
  4. Outside of steering group meetings it is also recommended that individual meetings with NGBs are coordinated to support delivery of the recommendations identified and ensure that this PPS reflects priorities as they change.

## **Consultation**

11. The proposed approach has been discussed at Environment and Transport Portfolio; Culture, Sport and Tourism Portfolio and Corporate Management Team.

## **Alternative Options**

1. There are no alternative options.

## **Implications of Recommended Option**

2. **Resources:**
  - a. **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that there is no base budget for this cost therefore the costs each

year would have to be funded from reserves allocated for each respective financial year.

- b. **Human Resources Implications** – There are no human resource implications arising from this report
1. **Property Implications** - There are no direct property implications arising from this report.
3. **Risk Management Implication** – Awaiting comments and will be updated when received
4. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - Awaiting comments and will be updated when received
5. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no direct crime and disorder implications.
6. **Health Implications** – An Integrated Impact Assessment has been prepared to consider any impacts of this strategy on people. Awaiting further comments and will be updated when received.
7. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - There are no climate emergency and sustainability implications.
8. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no direct human right implications.
9. **Ward Implications** - The actions will cover every ward in Gateshead.

## **APPENDIX 2**

The following is a summary of the key findings and recommendations from the Playing Pitch Strategy.

### **Football grass pitch**

- In total there are currently 59 football clubs in Gateshead who between them have 311 teams. There are also 83 teams from Gateshead that are recorded as being exported outside of the Borough;
- There are currently 74 sites in Gateshead that provide grass football pitches, this equates to 130 pitches in total. There are 93 pitches that are available for community use across 48 sites. There are also 17 sites that use to provide football pitches that are no longer marked out.
- Security of tenure is deemed to be an issue at 15 sites used by football clubs in Gateshead. Four of these are education sites and 11 are Council sites where clubs have short term agreements in place;

- There were 43 pitches assessed as being good quality, 43 assessed as being standard quality and 26 as poor quality;
- Borough wide, there are current shortfalls on youth football 11v11 pitches and youth football 9v9 pitches. There are no shortfalls on any other pitch types currently or in the future, although spare capacity on adult football pitches does reduce by one MES when future demand is considered.
- Third Generation Artificial Grass Pitches (3G AGPs) Summary
  - There are currently 18 3G AGPs in Gateshead across 10 sites. Five of these are 11v11 size pitches, the remaining 13 are smaller sized 3G AGPs. All 3G AGPs in Gateshead are available for community use;
  - A planning application has recently been approved to develop a new Power League centre on the top storey of the Metro Centre car park. This will look to provide 8 x 5v5 mini soccer 3G AGPs and ancillary provision;
  - Four out of the five 11v11 size 3G AGPs in the Borough that are available for community use are currently on the FA 3G Pitch Register. The 3G AGP at Blaydon Rugby Club is also World Rugby and RFL community compliant;
  - Four of the 11v11 size 3G AGPs in Gateshead were assessed as good and one as standard. All of the pitches in Gateshead are relatively new, having been installed within the last four years
  - There are currently 311 Gateshead based teams playing within the Borough. There are also 83 teams who are displaced out of the Borough for match play. This means that there is a requirement for 10 3G AGPs in Gateshead, with 4 11v11 size AGPs currently provided (excluding Blaydon Rugby Football Club), this leaves a shortfall of 6 11v11 size 3G AGPs. Should the 3G AGP project at Grace College progress, demand would reduce to five pitches. This would also cater for all current and future demand for 3G AGPs in the South sub analysis area.

### **Rugby Union Summary**

- There are currently 16 rugby union pitches identified within Gateshead across nine sites. Five of these pitches are education sites that often only provide rugby union pitches during the term when rugby union is being taught as part of the curriculum.;
- There are currently 14 rugby union pitches available for community use in Gateshead. The two pitches that aren't currently available for community use are both located on education sites;
- All rugby union club sites in Gateshead are deemed to be secured, with clubs either owning the freehold or having a long term lease in place.

Gateshead RFC use the Dryden Centre for summer training and ad hoc fixtures, they hire the pitches from the Council annually;

- No rugby union pitches were assessed as being good quality, with six pitches assessed as standard and 10 as poor. The majority of rugby union pitches used by clubs were assessed as standard (60%). All poor pitches used by clubs were located at Ryton RUFC. All sites used by rugby clubs currently contain at least one pitch with sports lighting;
- There are currently four rugby union clubs in Gateshead with a total of 63 teams
- There was no imported or exported demand reported by clubs in Gateshead. No clubs report any latent demand either;

### **Hockey Summary**

- There are currently 5 full size AGPs suitable for hockey in the Borough, 4 of these AGPs are available for community use. There are also 11 smaller sized AGPs, 8 of which are available for community use;
- Gateshead Hockey Club currently have no formal agreement in place for their use of the AGP Whickham School & Sports College, there is however a community use agreement in place at this site which protects community use of the AGP;
- There is one hockey club in Gateshead who have a total of five teams, all of which are senior teams;
- Given that all current hockey training and match play demand can be catered for at Whickham School & Sports College, consideration should be given to resurfacing other existing hockey AGPs to 3G in order to meet shortfalls identified. This should be done in conjunction with Sport England and the relevant NGBs.

### **Cricket Summary**

- There are currently 10 grass cricket pitches in Gateshead provided across 10 sites, all of which are available for community use. There are also two NTPs in Gateshead provided across two sites, both of which are available for community use;
- Eight grass cricket pitches were assessed as being good quality, one as being standard quality and one as being poor quality;
- There are currently 10 cricket clubs playing in Gateshead who between them have 72 teams;
- Cricket clubs in Gateshead identified future growth of seven teams;
- There are significant current and future shortfalls for cricket pitches across all three peak periods.

## **Rugby League Summary**

- There is currently one rugby league club located in Gateshead, Gateshead Storm. They currently have five teams. There are three sites in Gateshead that currently provide rugby league pitches, this consists of two senior pitches and one junior pitch. Both senior rugby league pitches are available for community use. The junior pitch at Bede Community Primary School isn't currently available for community use;
- Whilst security of community use isn't deemed an issue at either site used by Gateshead Storm, they only have an annual hire agreement in place at both sites;
- One rugby league pitch in Gateshead was assessed as being good quality and one was assessed as being standard quality;
- The senior rugby league pitch at Gateshead international Stadium is at capacity, whilst the senior rugby league pitch at Winlaton Vulcans RFC is overplayed by 1 MES.

## **Tennis Summary**

- There are 10 sites in Gateshead that provide outdoor tennis courts. This equates to 34 tennis courts in total, of which 25 are available for community use;
- Security of use is not deemed to be an issue on any tennis club sites in the Gateshead. Blaydon Tennis Club have 79 years remaining on their lease;
- The majority of tennis courts available for community use are an AGP surface, 14 in total. The remaining 11 are macadam;
- There are 3 sites with 17 tennis courts in Gateshead that are available for community use and provide sports lighting. This includes both sets of courts at Blaydon Tennis Club;
- Blaydon Tennis Club is the only site in Gateshead that provides gate access;
- There were 21 tennis courts in Gateshead available for community use assessed as being good quality and four assessed as being poor quality. Both sets of courts at Blaydon Tennis club were assessed as being good quality. The poor quality tennis courts are all located on Council sites;
- There is a combined membership of 266 adult members and 147 junior members in Gateshead. All of this demand is catered for at Blaydon Tennis Club;

## **Bowls Summary**

- There are currently 11 bowls clubs in Gateshead.
- There are currently nine disused bowling greens in Gateshead across eight sites. As they are all on Council sites, these are currently being maintained as

public open space unless a suitable organisation comes forward to take on the management and operation of them.

- There were 8 bowling greens assessed as good in Gateshead and 3 assessed as standard. No bowling greens were assessed as poor;
- At present there are sufficient bowling greens in Gateshead to cater for demand.