

West Berkshire Council

PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY

2024 - 2041

Background Document 2: PLANNING OFFICER GUIDANCE ON

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COUNCIL

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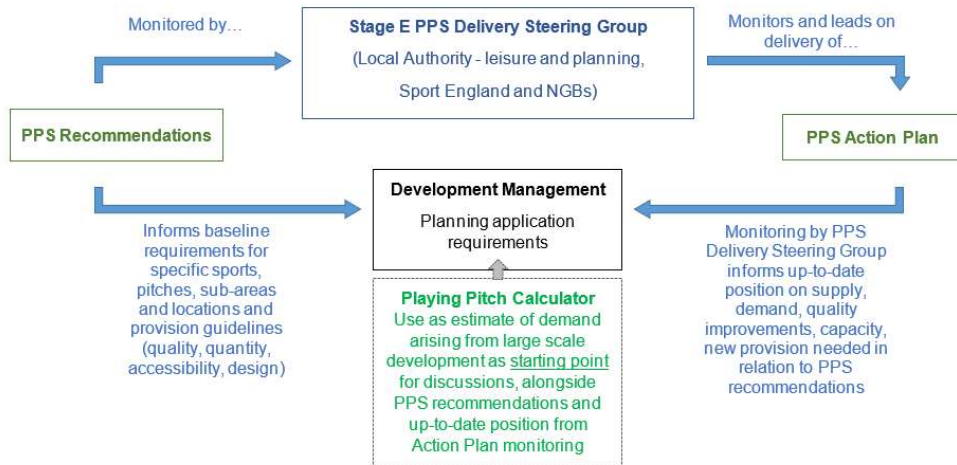
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Planning Officer Guidance: using this Strategy

To aid use of the strategy by local authority planning officers, the diagram below aims to guide local authority officers on the key factors to think about when considering development proposals / planning applications.

Guide to Interface between Delivery and Use of Strategy Recommendations to Inform Planning Applications



Within this context, the following section provides a guide for planning officers to aid use and application of this strategy when considering planning proposals.

Guidance / “Thought Process”

- The PPS deals with pitch sports defined in the typology. It has had input from local clubs, sports governing bodies, Sport England and key stakeholders. Consider the diagram above for context and relationship between Development Management and this strategy.
- The Executive Summary provides a useful overview of the strategy and its findings in broad terms.
- If the proposal does or is likely to have an impact on existing or future provision / needs / demand, or it is simply unknown, initially discuss with ‘Planning Policy’ officers and or ‘Leisure’ officers. Conversations with Sport England and / or the relevant sports governing bodies (and Active Partnership, subject to the relevance of the proposal) will also likely prove helpful and will be essential for many proposals. Discussions should not always be confined to those on which Sport England is currently a statutory consultee.
- Identify where in the study area the proposal is and which sub-area it is within (or if it is on the edge of a sub-area).
- If on the edge of a sub-area, bear in mind that an appropriate response to development proposals may need to take into account demand from other adjoining sub-areas. Also consider the potential role of exported / imported demand from neighbouring local authority areas. The assessment report includes sections which consider these issues.
- Do not assume that the application of any existing Local Plan standards for on-site open space will provide the answer for pitch needs. Remember that appropriate provision for sport to respond to demand from development may not require an on-site solution but

might instead require off-site provision or contributions to satisfy demand from the development, often at an existing pitch site or club base.

G. In most cases, contributions for demand arising for hockey, rugby union, cricket and other or lesser played pitch sports will be required for existing site improvements to facilities and / or pitch quality or maintenance. This increases capacity at most sites to accommodate demand subject to practical useability of additional quality / supply at the times / days needed for teams. Detail of whether this is possible should be discussed with NGBs and / or Sport England initially. Off-site contributions are also likely to be preferable for football from smaller scale developments, particularly where the Playing Pitch Calculator demand suggests single pitch provision from the development's demand. Consideration should be given to the appropriate size of pitch needed and whether that size, age group using the pitch or local demand necessitates changing rooms / pavilion. NGBs and / or Sport England are likely to be able to advise in the first instance.

H. Early consideration is required of how financial contributions can or should be collected for sport (i.e. through CIL or s106) subject to an adopted CIL regime.

I. Contributions are most likely to be required to focus on addressing capacity at existing sites nearest to the proposal, although this will not always be the case. This should be discussed with NGBs

and / or Sport England in the first instance who maintain a strategic picture of demand during PPS delivery.

J. To understand the amount of land required for pitch sizes (and associated ancillary facilities) to be accommodated, refer to the most up-to-date dimensions standards. These can be found at <https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/outdoor-surfaces>. Sport England also has Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance¹ which should also be considered.

K. A search in this Strategy and its appendices and Background Documents (and in the technical Assessment Reports) for club, location or ground names will provide salient information about demand, supply and the needs of specific sites and pitches and importantly, recommendations specific to sites. For additional provision, consider recommendations in the "ENHANCE" and "PROVIDE" sections of the strategy. For protection against loss, consider "PROTECT" recommendations.

L. When considering recommendations of the strategy, they are split by sub-area in the Appendices and Background Documents. Recommendations are set out under the headings of "PROTECT", "ENHANCE" AND "PROVIDE". Detailed recommendations for sites are set out in full in Background Document 1 of this strategy and are also reproduced in the technical Assessment Reports.

M. Loss of pitches. The "bottom-line" in this strategy is protect all pitches from loss and to protect mothballed / disused / closed / unused pitches as a reserve of supply, for future use and to accommodate

¹ See https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2025-07/Biodiversity%20Report-v6-15.pdf?VersionId=QgRci4g9qEvzvcemqN4FgOMGkd8_ySgr

potential future demand. If unavoidable, replacement could be a solution. All proposals will need to meet requirements of the Sport England Playing Fields Policy.

N. Sport England’s Playing Pitch Calculator provides a “policy off” or “strategy neutral” calculation of demand which can arise from new development proposals. This tool should not be used in isolation and cannot be expected to provide a quick and accurate answer. It can, however, be used to give an estimation of demand and capital and revenue costs required to address new demand. Figures generated through the calculator should be used alongside the recommendations in this Strategy and to inform discussion of an appropriate response with NGBs and Sport England.

How can housing developments contribute towards provision?

Sport England no longer support provision standards for playing pitches. The principal way of establishing a starting point for discussions about what on or off-site provision or financial contributions should be made from development can be derived by using Sport England’s playing pitch calculator. Provision can be made on or off-site, which should be determined through the planning process, with the most likely route for smaller developments being for off-site financial contributions being made towards improvement of existing pitches and ancillary facilities.

In cases where on-site provision is suggested, experience suggests that “provide and they will come” does not work for most pitch sports. Careful thought must be given the appropriateness, viability and practicalities of use, running and maintaining a pitch if in a location away from an existing club’s home ground. Economies of scale and

critical mass of members and volunteers required are also important factors, with provision of single pitch sites rarely representing good value or a practical solution when split sites draw members away from an existing home ground (therefore, introducing additional travel for some existing members / players) and where ancillary facilities also need to be provided at significant cost.

Careful consideration must also be given to not create single pitch community use sites where no existing club is prepared to play or run and maintain the site as a satellite location. Neither can it be automatically assumed that a new club will simply emerge from demand, given the need for volunteers and seed funds to establish a new club. It is also important to note that demand arising from the new population will occur incrementally as the development is delivered and occupied and that without sports infrastructure and “people capacity” in place at an early stage, demand will simply gravitate towards an existing club or clubs. This can often be the result of new residents moving to new developments who already live within the same housing market area – and it cannot be assumed that all new residents in a new development are new to the area and therefore these people will already have associations with existing sports clubs (and will be likely to retain them if travel time does not introduce an impediment such that it will stop them playing at their “home” club).

Operation of a satellite site for an existing club must be carefully thought through if this is considered to be a workable potential solution. For critical mass within age groups, it would be likely that a club would favour moving several age groups, for example, to a new satellite pitch. The implication can be that more existing players then have to travel further to the new satellite location than the alternative of players arising from demand at a new development travelling to an

existing club home ground. Support of NGBs is critical to realise effective and efficient creation of new clubs and / or the introduction of satellite sites for existing clubs.

Pooling or securing contributions from multiple sites can often be a more workable and appropriate solution for formal sports provision, if achievable within the planning system, where possible and where funds can be used to strengthen and improve capacity at existing club sites or can be channelled into strategic sports hub sites within a major development site to replace existing club sites where improvements and expansion of capacity could prove challenging in the longer-term.