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**Watford Borough Council
Sports Facilities Study
May 2012**



Watford Borough Council
Draft Sports Facilities Study
2012-2022

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1: Introduction



Why Does Watford Need this Study?

There is a major and growing divergence between stated national sports policy aspirations and reality. A key government and Sport England priority is to grow and then sustain higher levels of participation; and the governing bodies have strategies or development plans containing ambitious growth targets and in some cases ideas for new forms of traditional sports with potentially significant resource implications for both local authorities and their member clubs.

Evidence from Sport England's annual Active People Survey (APS), however, suggests that participation in most sports is either static or in decline. The overall level of adult participation in sport (measured in terms of the number taking part in sport for at least 30 minutes three times a week) has increased in only 15 council areas since 2007-8; gone down in 34; and remained constant in the other 277, including Watford. Of 32 individual sports for which Sport England has published figures, participation (defined in terms of participation at least once a week) has increased in three, declined in 14 and remained the same in the other 15. Nationally participation has increased only in the two highest social groups – ironically just about the only people not targeted by sports bodies trying to boost participation – probably because of the impact of commercial health and leisure clubs.

In addition, a recent national survey of sports clubs undertaken by the Sport and Recreation Alliance found that nearly half the voluntary clubs in England have seen their surplus halve in the past four years, to an average

of just over £1,000; a quarter are running at a loss and another quarter only just breaking even; adult membership has fallen by 11% since 2008; volunteer retention is an issue for over 50% of clubs; and two thirds of clubs are finding it difficult to attract new members and generate sufficient income.

The Council has to try to respond to both the “top down” national policy agenda and the “bottom up” needs of local clubs at a time of sharply declining resources. Its Sports Development Framework (SDF) sets an aspiration that Watford should be a town in which “participation in sport increases for everyone and there is a thriving and vibrant sporting infrastructure”. This study complements the SDF and:

- Identifies shortcomings in existing provision
- Provides information that will help the Borough Council, local schools and other sports facility providers manage their facilities effectively
- Identifies local needs for more or better facilities and provides evidence to support investment in them and bids for external funding
- Provides an evidence base to underpin the Council’s planning policies in relation to sports provision
- Identifies opportunities for cross-boundary working with adjacent councils

It is based on audits of existing provision, analysis of booking and usage records, club surveys and interviews with key stakeholders. All of this information is available in a background report entitled *Watford Sports Facilities Study Evidence Base* and this summary sets out:

- A number of “guiding principles” for the Council and its key partners
- Three long term “strategic goals” – in other words, what the Council intends to achieve, sometimes in the fairly long term
- The key facility-related issues that the Council and its partners need to tackle
- The specific actions that the Council and its partners intend to implement over the next decade

This study is concerned with outdoor sports provision to a greater extent than indoor facilities because in recent years the Council has concentrated on delivering the Woodside and Central Leisure Centres. It is deliberately ambitious because sport is an important part of the lives of many Watford citizens and it can help to deliver the One Watford vision of “a town to be proud of, where people will always choose to live, work and visit”. However, it won’t be possible for the Council to do everything that it might wish to do unless local clubs and sports interests are willing to embrace change.

2: Guiding Principles

The Role of the Council

- To ensure that there is adequate provision of sports facilities to meet current and anticipated future demand arising within the Borough for at least the most popular sports, plus a small margin to allow for unforeseen growth and the import of some demand from adjoining areas
- To ensure that all Council owned facilities, and any for which it grants planning permission, are fit for purpose, of good quality, financially and environmentally sustainable and meet appropriate governing body standards
- To ensure that all Borough residents are able to take part in the sport of their choice, or an acceptable substitute, at a cost they find affordable in facilities they find accessible and welcoming
- To support and foster a “mixed economy” of public, commercial, educational and voluntary sports provision
- To drive sports development in partnership with relevant governing bodies of sport and local clubs and other voluntary organisations such as community centres, schools, West Herts College and commercial sports providers
- To give the greatest support to those sports organisations and initiatives that will help deliver against wider national and local objectives in a sustainable way

The Role of Clubs

- To provide affordable, inclusive, welcoming and financially sustainable opportunities for local residents of all ages to take part in sport, whether recreationally or through playing for their club in local competitive leagues

The Role of Governing Bodies of Sport

- To support the Council by helping plan and deliver sustainable new forms of provision and harness positive trends in their sports in order to deliver desirable outcomes in terms of the Council’s corporate priorities and enhancing the quality of life, health and well being of the Borough’s residents
- To provide and support accessible and affordable pathways that will enable the best sportsmen and

women in the Borough to move on to higher levels of performance and achieve their sporting potential

The Role of Local Competitive Sports Leagues

- To provide a comprehensive and well run set of opportunities for Watford's clubs, teams and residents to take part in local competitive sport at a range of levels appropriate to their abilities

The Role of Schools

- To promote and manage community use of their sports facilities, giving particular priority to local clubs willing to provide pathways from school to community sport

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3: Outdoor Sports Provision - Key Issues

Sporting Contrasts

- There are two broad groups of sports clubs in the Borough. The two rugby clubs, the hockey club and the two tennis clubs with their own sites are thriving. They cater for players of all ages and both sexes, are financially viable, run a range of teams and offer high quality coaching to young players. Notably, they do not depend on the Council, although Watford Rugby Club leases part of its site from the Council.
- Many of the cricket and football clubs, however, are struggling. Most are just a single team without a proper home base and they find it difficult to attract players, volunteers and enough income to survive. Quite a few believe that the Council and sponsors should increase their funding rather than that their members should pay more for their sport. Every year some teams disband and others form. Many have a high level of dependency on the Council in terms of pitch provision and they regard council charges for pitch hire as expensive, although – for example - the average cost for a football pitch, with changing and showers, works out at an average of only about £2 per player per match.
- Most of the bowls clubs have low and in some cases declining membership and must be approaching non-viability. However, ironically the Council has probably done them a favour by granting them leases and making them responsible for their own maintenance as the quality of their sites has generally improved over the past year.
- Only Sun Postal Sports Club, West Herts Sports Club and Cassiobury Tennis Club own their sites, although Fullerians RUFC has a long lease.

The Location of Pitches

- Most Council pitches are located in parks. When they are being used for a booked activity they limit the use of the parks for informal recreation. They are also used informally and this increases wear and maintenance costs but generates no income.

The Size of Pitches

- A number of the cricket, football and rugby pitches in the Borough have dimensions and/or safety margins

that do not meet governing body standards.

- Some adult football teams have to play their home matches on U16 size pitches. For pragmatic reasons, referees are turning a blind eye but could refuse to allow adult matches to be played on them.
- The Football Association and English Rugby are seeking to ensure that all matches are played on appropriately sized pitches, especially at mini/youth/junior level and want councils to provide a range of pitch sizes; this will have significant land use and possibly financial implications for the Borough.

The Quality of Pitches and Other Outdoor Facilities



Woodside Playing Fields: a typical football goalmouth. This photograph was taken in September 2011 and therefore this is the best condition this pitch will be in throughout the 2011-12 playing season.

- Many of the Borough's cricket, football and rugby pitches (including the outfields for cricket pitches) are sloping or bumpy or wrongly oriented or drain poorly – or have several of these faults. Many football pitches have bare goalmouths year round.
- The only artificial cricket wickets in the Borough (at Watford Town CC and Westfield Community College) require replacement.
- Grass cricket pitches are not protected in any way when not being used or during the winter. There are many instances of grounds staff preparing cricket wickets on Thursdays or Fridays for weekend matches only for them to be used informally and damaged before the booked use. Council cricket pitches also require better infrastructure such as watering systems for squares and sightscreens.
- The grass tennis courts at Cassiobury Park are poor
- Some of the hard tennis courts in parks are poor and do not appear to be well used



Cassiobury Park grass tennis courts: in very poor condition by the end of the season

The Use of Council Facilities

- The average use of the Council's football pitches for which details are available (Callowland, Cassiobury, Harebreaks, KGV, Oxhey Park, Radlet Road, Watford Fields, Leavesden Green, Waterfield and Woodside) in season 2011-12 was only:

	Matches/week
Adult football pitches	1.06
Youth football pitches	0.82
Mini football pitches	0.93
Average for all Council pitches	0.93

- In the 2011 season, the average use of the Council's cricket pitches was only 0.78 matches per week.
- There was also significant peaking of football demand. In the thirty weeks of season 2010-11 there were:

110 Saturday morning football bookings (14.5%)
 36 Saturday afternoon football bookings (4.7%)
 577 Sunday morning football bookings (76.1%)
 35 Sunday afternoon football bookings (4.6%)

- This means that the Council has to maintain significantly more football pitches than if demand was spread more evenly across potential match times
- The Council is doing nothing to promote the use of its open access tennis courts; in some other areas councils have appointed tennis contractors that have developed very successful parks tennis programmes.

Council Leases

- Four of the five bowls clubs have 15-year leases of

their sites from the Council but they have only 13-14 years to run. However, funding agencies such as Sport England require clubs to have security of tenure for at least 15 years for any project costing £100,000 or more at the time of application. Cheaper projects require only seven years tenure. As many bowls club projects will cost less than £100,000 this should not be a problem. However, if the Council decides to lease other facilities to clubs it should ensure that leases are long enough to allow them to access external capital funding.

The Import and Export of Demand

- A number of Watford football teams have home pitches around the perimeter of the Borough eg at Francis Combe Academy, St Michael's School, Parmiter's School and Queens School
- Conversely, some teams from outside the Borough use Watford pitches, especially for cricket

The Cost of Pitch Hire

- The Council's pitches are cheaper than those in neighbouring local authority areas, but some clubs clearly struggle to meet the cost of hiring them.
- However, the commercial 5-a-side football complex at Queens School charges players more per hour than the Council and hosts around 140 teams each week, although not all of them are Watford-based

Artificial Turf Pitches



The floodlit 3G pitch at Parmiter's School: Watford needs several pitches like this; the pitch management says it could be booked out twice over

- The Borough has three artificial turf pitches (ATPs), at Woodside, Watford Grammar School for Boys and Westfield Community Technical College. The Watford Grammar School for Boys pitch is designed for hockey, but also used for some football, while the other two are used mainly for football. However, there are no third generation or "3G" ATPs ("3G"

pitches have a long pile artificial turf surface with a rubber crumb infill and are designed for football and rugby). The nearest is at Parmiter's School.

- ATPs can be used for up to four matches in a day, provided leagues allow more than one start time (as hockey does), plus midweek matches and training. Therefore they make much more efficient use of land than grass pitches and it is necessary to cancel matches only rarely because of bad weather. Some football clubs are likely to resist the introduction of a range of start times for Saturday and Sunday matches, simply because kick-off times are long established. However, there is growing acceptance of 3G pitches; for example, commercial 5-a-side soccer centres have been using them for years and the Saracens Rugby Club is proposing to play all of its home matches on a 3G pitch once it moves to Cophthall Stadium.

The Lack of Training and Practice Facilities

- There are no floodlit grass football pitches in the Borough and some teams do no midweek training, although some use one of the existing ATPs
- The floodlit grass training facilities available to the rugby clubs are overused and in very poor condition by halfway through the season
- Only the West Herts and Watford Town Cricket Clubs have practice nets
- There is a lack of decent quality floodlit multi-courts – ideally linked to community centres or schools
- Some of the Council's pitches are used for training but it derives no income from this use.
- Mini and midi rugby is particularly constrained by the lack of suitable pitches on Sunday mornings

The Quality of Changing

- The changing pavilions at Woodside Playing Fields (cricket and football), Callowland Rec (football), Watford Fields (football), Oxhey Park (football and Gaelic football), Harebreaks Rec (football), Waterfield Rec (football – but no longer used) and Leavesden Green Rec (football – also no longer used) do not meet current standards. In several of them referees have to share showers or changing with players. Callowland Rec and Woodside Playing Fields are not fit for much other than demolition while at Cassiobury Park the changing room is too far from the parking and pitches.



You get only one chance to make a first impression ... the entrance to the Callowland changing pavilion

Club Development

- The football pitches at Harwoods Recreation Ground, Radlet Road Playing Fields and Leggatts Campus, have no changing accommodation
- The KGV playing field off Tolpits Lane lacks proper social accommodation for cricket teas
- St Michael's School will not provide showers for players at the weekend in order to avoid water heating costs
- Of the Council pitch sites, only the changing rooms at the KGV Playing Field can be used by both male and female players at the same time
- At best, disabled accessibility to pavilions is poor
- Very few clubs in the Borough have any form of quality accreditation (eg Clubmark). Related to this, apart from the tennis and rugby clubs and a few of the football clubs, most clubs have either adult or junior members, but not both.
- Most of the football and a number of the cricket clubs have only one team and are economically fragile
- Most of the football and cricket clubs lack ambition – they are mainly groups of friends that enjoy a weekly game but aren't particularly bothered about improving their skills. Only a tiny handful of (Saturday) football teams play in leagues which are part of the pyramid system, which allows them to progress to higher standards of play. As players grow older, teams are likely to disband if one or two key players get injured or retire.
- There are no proper pathways from youth to adult football
- Very few adult football clubs have links to youth ones or schools, even the football academies at the Queens School and Parmiter's
- Very few clubs have development plans and they are

- not planning for the future; they are simply surviving
- Few clubs have any form of quality accreditation (eg Clubmark)
- There are no community football clubs other than Everett's and Sun Postal
- West Herts is the only multi-sports club
- Some of the smaller football and cricket clubs have an ambition to get their own ground or pavilion but are doing nothing to deliver them, they lack resources and there is no obvious spare affordable land in the Borough
- Among the larger clubs, Watford Town Cricket Club, Fullerians Rugby Club and West Herts Hockey Club all want to develop new changing and clubhouse accommodation but lack the funds to allow them to develop it.

Club Viability



West Herts Sports and Social Club – the only multi-sports club in the Borough

- Only Sun Postal FC and West Herts Sports Club own their sites, although Fullerians RUFC has a long lease
- Some of the football clubs are dependent on sponsorship, although most "sponsors" are simply making a donation as they get very little in return; in addition, clubs are finding it more and more difficult to find sponsors.
- Clubs with no home base find it very difficult to generate income
- Small clubs in all sports are likely increasingly to struggle for players, volunteers and money
- Football managers/secretaries find it very difficult to get match fees/subscriptions from players
- The rugby clubs are relatively strong, primarily because of their social memberships, which in turn is a function of the emphasis they place on running a range of teams in various age groups for both sexes
- The West Herts and Cassiobury Tennis Clubs are

thriving; Grosvenor Tennis Club is not

- The 5-a-side soccer centre at Queens School, Bushey, offers much of what many players appear to want – they don't have to pay an annual subscription or give up half a day to play, can play on midweek evenings, get lots of ball contact, match administration is done for them and it is easier to manage a team of five than one of eleven plus reserves

Girls and Women's Sport

- There is very little or no girls' and women's cricket, football or rugby
- Only Sun Postal FC amongst the men's football clubs has a women's team

Teenage Sport

- Teenage cricket and football appear to be in decline and this will have a knock-on impact on adult participation in due course

Pitch Costs and Subsidy Levels

- The Council lacks information on the operating costs of many of its outdoor facilities, particularly pitches. As a result it does not know the extent to which it is subsidising sports such as cricket and football and whether pitches are value for money. Generally speaking, however, pitches are the most highly subsidised of all publicly provided sports facilities on a subsidy per user basis.
- Installing new drainage for a poor quality grass football pitch can easily cost £40,000 and a new two-team changing pavilion to serve it an additional £250,000. Sport England's "Protecting Playing Fields" programme can provide grants of up to £50,000 towards these costs. It also advises that maintaining a grass football pitch properly costs around £10,000 per year. This expenditure would allow the Council to increase its annual income from one grass pitch by £2-300 from around £1,200 to £1,500 and result in a revenue subsidy, at current demand levels, of around £175 per hour of use. Therefore investment in grass pitches is a waste of money.
- A third generation (3G) ATP costs around £800,000 and a four-team changing pavilion around £575,000. The annual maintenance cost is similar to that of a grass pitch, although there is a need to build up a sinking fund to pay for carpet replacement every 8-10 years. At the same charges as for a grass pitch, and assuming 30 hours of use per week and floodlighting costs of £10,000 per year, the revenue surplus is about £10 per hour. In order to build up the sinking fund at a rate of £40,000 per year the required revenue subsidy per hour of use is around £17.
- For comparison purposes, Birmingham University's playing fields contain 13 grass pitches and 3.5 ATPs.

In round figures, the grass pitches generate a deficit of £200,000 per year and the ATPs a surplus of £200,000. These figures include pavilion and all grounds maintenance costs.

The Peaking of Demand

- A little over three quarters of the weekly demand for Council (and other) football pitches arises on Sunday mornings. This means that the Council has to maintain more pitches than would be necessary if demand was spread more evenly through the week; it also results in very low occupancy of most pitches. It will be desirable for the Council to find ways of promoting more mid-week participation so as to reduce the peaking of demand and ideally allow a reduced but more cost-effective pattern of provision.

Indoor Sports Provision



Woodside Leisure Centre: the 25 m x 8 lane pool. Most of the Borough's indoor facilities – public, school and commercial – are recently built and of high quality

- There are no indoor tennis courts in the Borough, but two large and successful tennis clubs. The nearest indoor courts are commercially managed and regarded as expensive by many local tennis players. Watford Grammar School for Boys has an aspiration to develop indoor courts at its New Field, although it is green belt. However, the Lawn Tennis Association will probably help fund an indoor complex, ideally complemented by outdoor courts.
- There is a need for a specialist gymnastics training hall at least 32 x 26 m plus ancillary accommodation. This will allow the Dolphina Club to expand and free times and space in the Woodside Leisure Centre for other activities. It is likely that such a hall will also attract other clubs to use it from outside the Borough. The best way of developing one – albeit fairly expensively – will be a partnership between the Dolphina Gymnastics Club and a school; a cheaper

alternative will be for the Borough Council and club to convert a suitable industrial unit. British Gymnastics is likely to prove at least moral support for such a development, which should help attract external funding.

- The Borough Council's excellent indoor leisure centres are extremely well used and have little spare capacity. However, some of the joint use school facilities could accommodate additional use and opening up these facilities more to community users should be a higher priority than the provision of additional ones. Possibly the most important initiative would be to work with schools with pools that lie unused at the weekend in order to increase the amount of training time available to the Watford Swimming Club.
- The Council requires a clear planning policy for the retention and enhancement of pitches and other sports facilities in the Borough

Planning Policy

Other Sports



Woodside Stadium

- The Woodside Stadium is a high quality, well equipped venue for **athletics** training and competitions. There is no need for any additional provision or further enhancements of the stadium for the foreseeable future.
- There is one **netball** club in the Borough. It plays in the Watford Netball League and the West Hertfordshire Netball League, both of which use the Queens School in Bushey as a four court "central venue". There are also four good quality netball courts at Parmiter's School, but local clubs find them too expensive. Accordingly netball participation could double before there will be a need for more facilities.

4: Strategic Goals

Strategic Goal 1

- To ensure that Watford has a network of accessible, high quality, high capacity, well maintained, well used and financially and environmentally sustainable sports facilities, capable of accommodating local demand, complemented by good quality changing and social accommodation, on a limited number of strategically located sites.

Rationale

Watford is a geographically small Borough, which means that it is possible to have both a relatively small number of separate facilities and high levels of accessibility. Having a small number of high capacity facilities – as the two excellent leisure centres have demonstrated – leads to economies of scale when compared with a larger number of smaller facilities. The borough also faces significant development pressures so has to make the best possible use of its limited land area.

Strategic Goal 2

- To promote the development of financially sustainable community-based multi-sport clubs offering inclusive opportunities for players of all ages and abilities and both sexes

Rationale

Watford has only one multi-sports club. Most other clubs are small, single sex and lack the resources to allow them to plan for the future. England Rugby, the Football Association and Sport England all want to see the development of vibrant, sustainable community-based multi-sport clubs for players of both sexes and all ages in order that they are vibrant, can offer good quality coaching and financially sustainable.

Strategic Goal 3

- To develop new forms of provision for traditional sports in partnership with their governing bodies in order to attract new participants and encourage past participants to return to their former sport, promote more mid-week participation and reduce the peaking of demand for pitches and other facilities at the weekend, particularly Sunday mornings

Rationale

There is growing evidence that some traditional sports are in decline. The reasons for this are not completely clear, but they appear to include growing family and work-related pressures on players' and volunteers' time; the amount of sport on television; the often poor (and sometimes worsening) quality of many local facilities; and the unwillingness or inability of some players to pay realistic charges for their sport. In response, forward-thinking governing bodies are responding by developing new forms of their sports, with smaller teams, shorter match times, playable throughout the week by players with limited skill. Specifically:

- **England Hockey** has launched a new small-sided form of the game called Rush Hockey
- The **England and Wales Cricket Board** is actively promoting shorter matches, for example using the 20-20 format, and developing a softball version of the game requiring less protective equipment. There is also a commercially-run "Last Man Stands" league for teams of eight players, designed to last for only about two and half hours.
- **England Rugby** is actively promoting Rugby Sevens, Tag and Touch in an attempt to reverse the recent decline in participation.

5: Outdoor Sports Provision - Action

General

The Council should draw up a schedule of all the annual maintenance operations undertaken on both cricket and football pitches and estimate the time and materials required for each of them. Using this information, it will be able to work out the approximate cost of maintaining a typical pitch for a year. By comparing this with the hours of booked use and income from this use it will then be able to calculate the net subsidy per hour of use.

Callowland Recreation Ground

Long term role	Local park
Short term	Protect the park through the planning system
Longer Term	Take the pitches out of operation once it is possible to accommodate the current demand on other sites

Cassiobury Park

Long term role	Borough-wide Green Flag(ship) park
Short term	Protect all parts of the park through the planning system Encourage the Croquet Club, Grosvenor Tennis Club and the Bowls Club to merge to provide the croquet and tennis players with access to changing and social facilities and improve the financial sustainability of the bowls club
Medium term	If any merger proceeds and is successful, relocate two of the croquet lawns to the grass tennis courts adjacent to the bowls club Remove the football pitches, as soon as replacement football capacity is available on ATPs elsewhere

Garston Park

Long term role	Local park
Short term	Enhance the park through the

planning system. Remove the football pitches, as soon as replacement football capacity is available on ATPs elsewhere

Harebreaks

Short term

With Herons FC, consider relocation to help fund the development of the strategic pitch sites and amalgamation of the Herons Youth FC with an adult football club at a community sports club site. The Herons lease ends shortly so the Council could renew it on only a short term basis until the future of this site is resolved.

Longer Term

Take whatever action may be agreed with Herons Youth FC

Harwoods Recreation Ground

Long term role

Local park

Short term

Protect the park through the planning system

Longer Term

Remove the pitch and enhance the site as a local park

King George V Playing Fields

Long term role

Strategic pitch site with cricket and grass football pitches and a 3G ATP available for hire, managed from the Community Centre

Short term

Prepare a masterplan for development as a strategic pitch site

Longer Term

Implement the masterplan

Leavesden Green

Long term role

Local park

Short term

Protect the park through the planning system

Longer Term

No action

Leggatts Campus

Long term role

Community cricket and football club

Short term

Protect the site through the planning system

Ensure that the developers provide Everetts FC with a suitable changing pavilion through a

planning obligation

Longer Term Encourage the club to develop a cricket wicket and invite one of the local cricket clubs that wants a clubhouse/ground of its own to merge with it

Oxhey Park

Long term role Grass pitch site for hurling and football (subject to WHC proposals as they evolve)

Short term Protect the park through the planning system and require a contribution to compensatory provision if the proposed Health Campus link road affects the sports facilities

Radlet Road Playing Fields

Long term role Grass pitch site, ideally with part retained as mini-rugby pitches for Watford Rugby Club and/or a small park for local residents. Possible re-location for impacted facilities at Oxhey Park

Fullerians RUFC

Long term role Strategic pitch site, ideally with a community multi-sports club offering cricket, football, hockey and rugby. However, Fullerians is at present unlikely to agree to any merger as it wishes to retain its identify as a rugby club.



Fullerians Rugby Club; the training pitch is badly over-used and the club would benefit from a 3G surfaced training area that could also be used by footballers from the adjoining Sun Sports and Social Club. As

the Watford Grammar School for Boys already has a hockey ATP on adjoining land the site is well on the way to being a multi-sports club, or partnership of clubs.

Waterfields Recreation Ground	Short term	Protect the site through the planning system
	Longer Term	Approach Sun Postal, Fullarians RUFC and the Grammar School and seek their agreement to the preparation of a masterplan for the two sites site that includes a 3G pitch designed for rugby and football, better drainage and an artificial cricket wicket, with access from Bellmount Wood Avenue.
	Long term role	Local park
Watford Fields	Short term	Demolish the changing accommodation
	Longer Term	Protect the site through the planning system
	Long term role	No action
Knutsford Playing Fields (Watford RUFC)	Short term	Local park
	Longer Term	Protect the site through the planning system
	Long term role	Remove the pitch and changing accommodation when there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the current demand at an SPS
West Herts Sports Club	Short term	Community rugby club (as now)
	Longer Term	Protect the site through the planning system
	Long term role	Investigate the potential for the Rugby Club to use part of the Radlet Road Recreation Ground for mini and midi-rugby
	Longer Term	Support the club if it wishes to develop or enhance its facilities further
	Long term role	Community sports club with cricket, football and squash (as now)

	Short term	No action
	Longer Term	Support the club if it wishes to develop or enhance its facilities further
Westfield Community College	Long term role	Strategic Pitch Site
	Short term	Protect the site through the planning system
		Encourage the College to allow cricket practice and work with Hertfordshire Cricket to promote new forms of cricket on its playing fields and ATP
		Seek the College's agreement to the development of its site as an SPS and if this is forthcoming draw up a masterplan for the site with 5 x 5, 7 x 7 and 9 v 9 grass pitches plus a floodlit 3G ATP to complement the existing sand-dressed ATP, a new artificial cricket wicket, upgraded net practice facilities and a community sports club building
	Longer Term	Deliver the masterplan
Woodside Playing Fields	Long term role	Strategic Pitch Site
	Short term	Protect the site through the planning system
		Draw up a masterplan for the site with four main components: A community sports club on the western part of the site offering cricket and football to players of all ages and both sexes, to be formed by the amalgamation of Watford Town Cricket Club and at least (a) a football club playing in the West Herts Saturday League; (b) a football club playing in one of the Sunday leagues; and (c) at least one mini/youth football club. This club could include changing and social accommodation overlooking the enclosed cricket pitch and the grass football pitch immediately to

the east of it; it may be possible to re-use part of the existing building for this purpose, together with upgraded changing for other clubs using the grass pitches.

Conversion of the existing ATP adjacent to the Leisure Centre into three enclosed smaller pitches with a 3G surface. At present the 100 x 60 m area is split into four 5-a-side football areas each 55 x 23 m that share common sidelines, plus a safety margin around the perimeter. If it was divided into three 60 x 33 m areas, separated by rebound walls, it could be used for both mini-soccer at the weekend and adult 5-a-sides during the week. This would allow significantly more mini-soccer and generate additional mid-week income.

A full size **floodlit 3G ATP** in the eastern part of the site to be managed from the Woodside Leisure Centre

New forms of provision for **small-sided cricket and hockey** (to be planned in partnership with the relevant governing bodies)

Longer Term

Deliver the masterplan

Demolish the existing cricket club pavilion

Develop a new or refurbished depot for the Council

Ideally, Parmiter's and Queens Schools should become Strategic Pitch Sites serving clubs from Watford, Three Rivers and Hertsmere. There is considerable cross-boundary movement of teams in these three areas, with what are essentially Watford-based teams playing in adjoining areas and vice versa. Both schools already let their facilities to teams from a wide area. Therefore there is a sound argument that the Council should formally approach Three Rivers, Hertsmere, the County Council and the two schools to plan and deliver partnership developments at the two schools sites, especially as this will also benefit the schools' PE and extra-curricular programmes. Parmiter's already has a

3G pitch and excellent changing accommodation; Queens School, as a specialist sports college, should have at least one ATP, but does not, and its current pitch changing is poor.

If the adjoining Councils are not willing or able to enter into a partnership development, a good alternative will be the Metropolitan Police. Its facilities in Bushey are already well used by a significant number of community teams for midweek training and weekend matches and the addition of a third generation ATP will be a very cost effective way of increasing its overall capacity to accommodate community use.

DRAFT

6: Indoor Sports Provision - Action

The Indoor Leisure Centres

General

The Council should work with SLM to ensure that its excellent leisure centres remain in the best possible condition and re-invest in them keeping them looking up to date and welcoming as and when necessary.

Woodside Leisure Centre

It will be desirable to move the Dolphina Gymnastics Club into purpose-designed premises as soon as possible. Accordingly the Council should work with the Club and British Gymnastics to develop a plan for this.

Joint Use School Facilities

Enter into discussions with local schools with indoor sports facilities to find cost effective ways of maximising their use by local sports clubs

7 Delivery

There are three main elements to delivery: planning policy, developing partnerships and funding.

Planning Policy

The key findings of this review are that:

- **Participation:** most sports clubs in the Borough are small and potentially financially unsustainable; there is a high level of dependence on Council facilities; and there are only limited opportunities for teenage participants to progress into adult teams and clubs
- **Provision:** the average usage of grass cricket and football pitches across the borough is low but there is significant peaking of football demand on Sunday mornings; there is a surplus of adult football pitches but a need for more mini-soccer and youth pitches; more than adequate provision of floodlit artificial turf pitches suitable for hockey; a need for more training facilities for rugby, together with more mini and midi pitches; the quality of pitches for cricket and football, and related changing accommodation, is poor; the bowls clubs have good and generally improving facilities and provide valuable facilities, particularly for older people; the two large tennis clubs are thriving; and there is adequate provision for athletics and netball.

In the light of these findings, and the twin aims of the Council's Sports Development Framework, the study proposes four main courses of action with land use implications:

- The development of four "**strategic pitch sites**" in the Borough - Woodside Playing Fields in the north of the Borough; the Watford Grammar School/Sun Postal Football Club/Fullerians Rugby Club site in the centre of the Borough; the Westfield Community Technical College; and the KGV Playing Fields in the south of the Borough. Each of these sites will have a mix of grass and floodlit artificial turf pitches, good quality changing and provide a home base for a

community sports club, formed by the amalgamation of two or more existing clubs, or the sharing of facilities by a group of clubs. Over time, the Council should work with clubs and leagues to maximise the use of the ATPs and minimise the need for grass pitches as they require high levels of subsidy per player

- The potential joint development of additional strategic pitch sites at Parmiter's and Queens Schools, subject to the agreement of the schools, the County Council and the adjoining councils. Should these prove to be undeliverable, a good alternative will be to work in partnership with the Metropolitan Police to maximise use of its facilities by Watford clubs, for example, by supporting the development of a floodlit 3G pitch.
- The protection of existing tennis courts and bowling greens and the relocation of the croquet lawns in Cassiobury Park to the grass tennis courts area not occupied by Grosvenor LTC
- The removal of pitches from parks as additional pitch capacity becomes available at the strategic pitch sites

Policy G14, *Sport and Recreation*, in the Council's draft Core Strategy embeds its Sports Development Framework in planning policy. The Core Strategy would however also benefit from the inclusion of the finding of this work regarding the need for a study that incorporates the consolidation and improvement of sports facilities to create strategic sports sites. Further sports policy detail can be provided at a lower level in the LDF hierarchy of documents which would provide guidance on how the Council will respond to planning applications relating to sports facilities, and what the Council wishes to achieve in terms of sports provision.

The most appropriate place to set out such detailed planning policy will be in the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPDs. Suitable planning policy will be along the lines of:

The Council will:

- 1 Support development proposals for any of the designated strategic pitch sites if they will:
 - (a) increase the "carrying capacity" of the site and ability to accommodate higher levels of participation or standards of play; or
 - (b) support the creation of a financially and environmentally sustainable voluntary community sports club that will cater for participants of both sexes and all ages; or

- (c) be ancillary to the use of the site for sport and physical recreation (eg new changing rooms or parking) and not adversely affect the quantity, quality or carrying capacity of the pitches and other facilities and their use; or
- (d) affect only land which is incapable of being used for sport and physical recreation or related ancillary accommodation
- 2 Not allow the development for another purpose of any sports facilities owned or operated by a sports club or school unless
- (a) The Council is satisfied that there is no current or foreseeable future need for the facility; or
- (b) The sports facility that will be lost as a result of the proposed development will be replaced by a facility with at least the same carrying capacity and of better quality in a suitable location, with long term arrangements acceptable to the Council that will guarantee both public access and effective management and maintenance; or
- (c) The proposed development is for an outdoor or indoor sports facility of sufficient benefit to the development of sport to outweigh its loss
- 3 Allow the potential development of all or part of some existing pitch sites without changing accommodation, provided that compensatory provision at the nearest strategic pitch site will increase its capacity to accommodate use by an amount at least equivalent to the playing capacity that will be lost and there is no need to retain all or part of the site for another sport or greenspace use
- 4 Require housing developers to contribute to the development or enhancement of the nearest strategic pitch site to their proposed development

Developing Partnerships

It is not realistic to expect the Council to do everything that is desirable to ensure the future health of sport and recreation in the Borough. Instead, it has to work in partnership with a range of agencies including local clubs, schools, county and national sports governing bodies, the County Sports Partnership and potential funding agencies.

Accordingly it should:

- Seek the support of potential partners for this study
- Institute an annual meeting at the end of each playing season with pitch sport leagues (and in time,

representatives of the community clubs) to provide them with feedback on the levels of use of Council facilities and any issues that have arisen, estimate future needs, agree priorities for the next season and seek their views on any development proposals the Council is planning to implement in the following year.

- Initiate discussions on the potential partnership developments suggested in Sections 5 and 6, bearing in mind that they are likely to be long term projects that will depend on significant external funding for their delivery.

Funding

Delivering this study will not be cheap, but as its core aim is to drive up participation in a sustainable way the projects it proposes should be attractive to potential funding agencies such as Sport England and the Football Foundation.

However, generating external funding will depend on the Council being able to meet a significant share of the cost itself. As the Borough is subject to considerable development pressure it should be able to generate some developer contributions, initially through S106 agreements and in the longer term through the Community Infrastructure Levy.

In addition, the Council should also be willing to consider generating capital receipts from the disposal of under-used assets. In some cases it *may* be acceptable to sell the whole of a site, in others it will be *desirable* to retain part for a new local greenspace. The main football leagues insist that the pitches used by their member teams should have changing accommodation, so the Council should review the need to retain those sites without changing. Given the peaking of football demand and the limited capacity of grass pitches to accommodate use, providing changing for them will be a waste of money. Some disposals will also reduce grounds maintenance costs or – better – allow the Council to spend more on maintaining the strategic pitch sites without increasing its overall outdoor sports maintenance revenue budget.