

PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 1 September 2014
Report of: Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets)
Title: A Draft 10 Year Sports Facilities Strategy for Watford

1.0 **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report presents the first draft of a Sports Facilities Strategy for Watford, which identifies a range of strategic goals for the future of sports facilities within the borough as well as an action plan for delivery.
- 1.2 The draft Strategy has developed through considerable cross departmental work as this is a complex area that requires effective joint working. It has also been informed through early engagement with a number of key stakeholders.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 To endorse the draft Sports Facilities Strategy and approve it for wider consultation with the local community as detailed in Section 3.7

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Report approved by: Lesley Palumbo – Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services; Alan Gough – Head of Community and Customer Services; and Manny Lewis – Managing Director

3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

3.1 Watford Borough Council commissioned a Sports Facilities Study in part as a response to early objections raised by Sports England to the Core Strategy pre-submission document. These objections highlighted the overall lack of strategic direction for the development of sports facilities across the Borough, which the Study aimed to identify and address. It also provided a framework for the council's Sports Development Framework and provided the evidence base to develop a way forward for improving and enhancing sports facilities across the Borough, leading to future long term strategy development and delivery.

The Study was carried out by Kit Campbell Associates (KCA) – experts in this field of work - and was completed in May 2012.

A number of findings were described in the Study and ranged from the quality of pitches to the lengths of leases to the lack of 3G pitches in the Borough.

The Study has provided the basis for the development of the draft Sports Facilities Strategy although work has been undertaken to refresh the evidence base and context as required. (see Appendix A).

This draft Strategy summarises and details a mixed view of sport in Watford and highlights those who are **thriving** or merely **surviving**. There is now a much greater need to look at the existing provision of sports facilities more strategically and, as a result of further and continued engagement, both with members and key stakeholders, a draft 10 year Strategy is now presented for approval to consult with the wider community and other key stakeholders such as Sport England, National Governing Bodies, Clubs etc.

3.2 The 10 year draft Strategy considers a number of guiding principles, including the role of the council, clubs and governing bodies. However, it is important to put things into perspective and further clarify what the local situation is in comparison to the national picture; this is, therefore, highlighted in the draft Strategy. This has since been reviewed and 'refreshed' in 2014. The picture basically remains the same as in 2012 but emphasises that the picture is not unique to Watford.

A number of further considerations are taken into account and include planning policy issues and the impact on green belt (many of our sports sites are within green belt), the likely impact of the property review as well as the need to review and look at the impact of the Sports Development Framework.

Taking all into consideration, this draft 10 year Sports Facilities Strategy in essence sets out what the council intends to achieve over this period, setting a number of strategic priorities based on the evidence base collected in 2011 / 12 and later discussions and engagement in 2014. It

clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities of the council and its partners / stakeholders to deliver this Strategy.

3.3 The Strategy specifically recommends 3 strategic goals:-

Strategic Goal 1 (SG1)

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 – known as “**Strategic Sports 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. We also face significant development pressures so we have to make the best possible use of our limited land area.

Strategic Goal 2 (SG2)

To promote the development of financially sustainable 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 are financially sustainable.

Strategic Goal 3 (SG3)

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.

3.4 We have also highlighted the three main elements to the actual delivery of this Sports Facilities Strategy: **planning, developing partnerships and funding** and these are discussed and developed as part of an Action Plan within the Strategy.

3.5 **Recent Progress**

As part of the development of this draft Strategy, early discussions have already been undertaken with a number of key stakeholders on those sites that have been earmarked as strategic sports sites. These have included discussions with: Fullarians RFC, Glen Rovers Gaelic Football Club, Watford Town Cricket Club, West Herts Hockey Club, Herts Bowls, Cassiobury Croquet Club, The Olympian Football League, Sunday Football League, Cassiobury Lawn Tennis Club, Watford Boxing Club in relation to their current club issues and what their aspirations for future development are.

3.6 **The Way Forward**

A considerable financial investment has already been made over the past few years in upgrading many of our green spaces 'offer'. This ability to invest 'in the future health and well being of our community' and in particular outdoor sports facilities often associated and within green spaces, will be constrained as available local authority funding continues to reduce.

The detailed Action Plan in the draft strategy requires a financial commitment, but with the reductions in funding opportunities, the 10 year Action Plan recognises the need for a longer delivery period. Alternative funding mechanisms such as government funding and partnerships will need to be further developed in order to make the Action Plan a reality.

Traditional funding through Section 106 capital receipts and the community infrastructure levy will be used wherever possible and this Sports Facilities Strategy will provide the evidence base to justify such investment.

On this basis and in summary, this 10 year strategy 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; and
- The specific actions that the council and its partners intend to implement over the next decade

3.7 **Engagement and Communication on the Strategy**

Engagement and communication has been identified as a vital element in the development of the Strategy and in the effective delivery of its recommendations.

Early engagement has taken place with clubs and organisations associated with the four strategic sites to inform the draft Strategy presented and this was valuable in highlighting current issues, future plans and the appetite for collaboration and joint working.

An overview of the approach recommended on engagement and communications is attached at Appendix B. This outlines that following the period of informal engagement during July / August 2014, wider engagement and consultation on the draft Strategy is recommended for the autumn. This will involve inviting quantitative feedback from a wide range of stakeholders through a short questionnaire. Identified stakeholders include all local clubs and organisations, the wider community, councillors and national, regional and local sports governing bodies. A consultation event will also be arranged for October to allow face to face discussions and feedback.

3.8 **Timescales for finalising the Strategy**

September: approval by Cabinet of draft for engagement & consultation

September to November: engagement & consultation (see Appendix B)

November: update and amend the final strategy

December: final Strategy to Cabinet for adoption

Post December: feedback on final Strategy to wider community

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.2 Any future investment required to fund the strategy will need to be considered as part of the Council's annual budget strategy. This will be considered as part of the annual budget process.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that any legal implications are contained within the strategy

4.3 **Equalities**

4.3.1 An Equality Impact Analysis is being developed alongside the Strategy. It will be reviewed and updated to take into account feedback from engagement and consultation and will be presented in December as part of the report to Cabinet on the final Strategy.

4.4 **Risk**

4.4.1 The Environmental Services Client team will develop a detailed risk register for the delivery of the Sports Facilities Strategy and Action Plan which will set out all the current risks and identifies the mitigating actions needed to manage the risks. This will continue to be monitored and updated throughout the life of the Strategy.

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
Unable to secure capital funding	2	4	8
Failure to engage key stakeholders in Strategy and recommendations	2	4	8
Changes in policy locally and nationally	1	2	2
Staff pressures and lack of resources to deliver	1	4	4

4.5 **Staffing**

4.5.1 The responsibility for delivery and management of the Sports Facilities Strategy with Action Plan will be in partnership with many of our sports clubs, governing bodies and will be delivered 'cross council'. It is led by the Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets).

4.6 **Accommodation**

4.6.1 Not applicable

4.7 **Community Safety**

4.7.1 Not applicable

4.8 **Sustainability**

4.8.1 Not applicable

Background Papers: None

File Reference: None

Appendix A – A Draft Sports Facilities Strategy for Watford - 2015 – 2025

Appendix B – Engagement and communications for Sports Facilities Strategy