



**A SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY
FOR WATFORD**

2015 – 2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The case for taking part in sport and fitness activities can be, and has been, made many times - but this does not mean that its value is universally understood. Involvement in sport and physical activity, whether it is for fitness, casual recreation or a way of life, is usually regarded – and often dismissed – as a matter of personal preference. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Many people do not have the opportunity to take part in sport and fitness activities or to achieve their sporting potential. Analysis of participation patterns nationally and locally in Watford from Sport England’s Active People Survey shows that many sports are declining whilst others are doing better – *surviving or thriving* - moreover there are significant variations in participation rates and opportunities across the Borough.

Watford Borough Council therefore needed to understand better, what the local situation was, and commissioned Kit Campbell Associates to carry out a major study and analysis of sport facilities in the town. This was carried out in 2011/12 and underpins this new Sports Facilities Strategy. They reviewed the supply of and demand for a range of common sports facilities in the Borough; identified needs for more or better provision and opportunities to rationalise the pattern of provision in order to meet local demand better or more cost effectively; and sought to suggest ways of “future proofing” sports provision. They identified the planning context; gathered relevant information; carried out significant analysis (including assessment of the supply and demand for pitches using a slightly modified version of the Sport England Playing Pitch Model).

However, change for the better does not just happen, but results from the interaction of a complex set of social, economic, political and environmental factors or “drivers”. Few if any of these drivers are unique to Watford; instead they range from those over which the Council has little or no effective control, such as global warming, legislation and the priorities of the government of the day, to those it can promote and guide, such as sports development, the provision of sports facilities and the rate of house building.

The key drivers of change likely to affect sport and recreation provision in Watford include:

- Climate Change and Global Warming;
- Growing socio-economic inequalities;
- Greater demand for personalised solutions;
- Ageing and agelessness;
- Greater inequality in health;
- Greater obesity;
- Greater split between families and the child-free;
- The changing nature of community and ‘localism’;
- Time versus money;

- ‘Nowism’;
- Customer expectations;
- Eco-friendliness;
- Reduced disposable income;
- Public sector budget restraints;
- The need to find more effective ways of managing the community use of school sports facilities:
- A greater role for the voluntary sector and new types of sports club: and
- New forms of traditional sports.

This 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 between 2011 and 2012. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Council and its partners and stakeholders. The analysis undertaken is highlighted and it paints a mixed view of sport in Watford. Issues highlighted included many clubs who have no bases, and are reliant on the council for facilities; the poor quality of facilities in many locations; the peaking of usage, especially on a Sunday morning; the length of leases is often too short and restricts clubs from obtaining grants and being able to plan long-term; the lack of artificial turf pitches; lack of training facilities; poor quality of changing facilities; low number of clubs with any accreditation; and club viability is often fragile. However, despite this, some are doing well and thriving and include the rugby clubs, hockey and tennis clubs.

Therefore, a strategic direction has been proposed that recognises the wide ranging planning policy issues, and in particular the need to be reflected in the Local Plan and review of Green Belt policy locally. Based on this robust evidence, three strategic goals are recommended:-

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**”.

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

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

The three main elements to the delivery of these three strategic goals will be through the **planning system, developing partnerships** and **funding** and incorporate the findings of the property review in 2014 as well as seeking further opportunities through the wider delivery of sports development in Watford.

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.



1. INTRODUCTION

Why does Watford need this Sports Facilities Strategy?

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 sports participation; and the national 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 in 2011 (APS), however, suggested that participation in most sports was either static or in decline and has been for a number of years. 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) had 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 had published figures, participation (defined in terms of participation at least once a week) had increased in three, declined in 14 and remained the same in the other 15. Nationally participation had increased only in the two highest social groups – ironically just about the only people not targeted by sports bodies trying to boost participation, and is possibly because of the impact of commercial health and private leisure clubs.

However a briefing issued by the Local Government Information Unit (LGiU) in August 2014 looked at the implications for local authorities of Sport England's latest Active People Survey for 2013/14 post Olympics which showed that more people are now playing sport than ever before. It summarised that:-

1. A record 15.6 million people aged 16 and over are playing sport regularly, 1.7 million more than in 2005 when London won the bid to host the Olympic Games;
2. The largest growth is in young people, but there remains a significant gap in participation between young men and women and between people with disabilities and their non-disabled peers;
3. Local authorities should develop a coherent strategy for sports provision that is based on local need, informed by new models of service delivery, and fully aligned with the delivery of local public health services.

The LGiU briefing made the following recommendations:

1. Local authorities should understand how the national trend towards more people playing sport regularly translates locally. They should make use of local information on who plays sport and how to inform the wider commissioning of services in their areas, particularly in the public health

- arena, where there is so much to gain from encouraging people to stay active.
2. Local authorities should review their current sport and leisure offer against local demand and develop a coherent long term strategy for sport that is aligned and integrated with other relevant service functions;
 3. Where investment is needed councils should turn to more innovative models of service delivery, collaborating with sport and leisure providers and attracting investment around outcomes-based contracts, social impact bonds, or payment by results schemes that lend themselves well to sports provision in the community rather than under council control; and
 4. Local authorities should look at their governance arrangements to ensure that sport and leisure bodies are adequately represented in strategic decision making. Health and well-being boards for example should have strong links in with the local Community Sports Partnership.

In addition, a recent national survey of sports clubs undertaken by the Sport and Recreation Alliance in 2013 found that between 2010 and 2012 there has been a 67% increase in the average club's surplus, which is now £1,825, but, this is still 39% lower than it was in 2007. The average club now has 114 adult members – an increase of 21% since 2011 but are still below the peak of 2008. More than half (58%) of the UK's sports clubs are currently working with schools and nine in ten school-club links are reported as being successful. The average sports club has 33 non-participating members indicating that sports clubs don't just offer opportunities to play sport but a social environment for the community to be part of. Only one in ten clubs (13%) say they have had a sustained membership increase following London 2012.

Only one in five (21%) sports clubs in the UK own their own facilities. Two in five (38%) hire from local authorities. 49% of clubs want to improve their facilities and 47% see increasing facility costs as upcoming challenges. This will also be further impacted by the decision from Sport England to cut a total of £1.6 million from its £30 million grassroots funding for the next three years from 2014 to the Football Association.

Only one in three (35%) UK sports clubs has access to appropriate equipment for both disabled and non-disabled people to participate and in the last year, the decision was taken by 26% of clubs to decrease expenditure by not renewing equipment. Sport has more volunteers than any other sector and since 2011 the number of volunteers giving their time to sports club has gone up 20% – with the average club now having 24.

The Council therefore needs 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 within Local Authorities and sports clubs themselves. The Council's Sports Development Framework 2011-14 (SDF) set 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”***. In 2012, the council commissioned a study of

all its sports facilities by Kit Campbell Associates (KCA), to complement the SDF and set out the following:

- To identify shortcomings in existing provision;
- To provide information to help the Council, local schools and other sports facility providers to manage their facilities effectively;
- To Identify local needs for more or better facilities and to provide evidence to support investment in them and bids for external funding;
- To provide an evidence base to underpin the Council's planning policies in relation to sports and outdoor recreation provision; and
- To identify opportunities for cross-boundary working with adjacent councils.

This study was based on audits of existing provision, analysis of booking and usage records, club surveys and interviews with key stakeholders in 2012. All of this information is available in a background report entitled "*Watford Sports Facilities Study Evidence Base*".

The Council's **Sports Development Framework's** focus was to build on the good work already undertaken by partners, clubs, voluntary sector agencies, individuals, schools and various partnerships. It recognised that we have over 200 voluntary sports clubs in Watford, who work hard to provide a wealth of sporting opportunities for everyone. Its priorities were to:-

1. Increase community participation in physical activity and sport to contribute towards a healthy town for Watford residents; and
2. Develop capacity within the local sporting infrastructure, particularly around clubs, coaches and volunteers, to improve sporting opportunities.

The framework promoted a move away from direct provision to one of **enabling and commissioning** and focussed on the following:-

- Enabling and commissioning partners / organisations and local sports clubs to create sustainable sporting opportunities amongst identified target groups;
- Support the continuation of a vibrant Community Sports Network – Active Watford and other relevant stakeholders through active networks and forums;
- Help secure external future funding for sports to contribute to outcomes locally. Enable / manage funding to be effectively commissioned through our local sporting infrastructure; and
- Working in partnership with SLM to implement specific elements of the framework.

Successes have been many:-

- Watford Borough Council's Bursary scheme which offered volunteers from Watford sports clubs the opportunity to apply for a subsidy to support the development of their coaching qualifications. The overall increased number of qualified level 1, 2 and 3 coaches in Watford is 63 across a total of 13 different sports;

- Watford Borough Council in partnership with the Herts Sports partnership offered subsidised workshops to support Watford sports clubs that are working towards clubmark accreditation to develop the skills of their coaches. The Council has supported over 85 people from local sports clubs to attend the workshops including Equality, First Aid, Safeguarding, and coaching disabled people;
- In partnership with Herts CC, British Cycling and Watford Cycle Hub the Council has delivered a local Sky Ride programme specific to Watford for a three year period. This equates to 25 led rides being set up, throughout the summer. There were 46 partnership councils, Watford was in the top five performers and was also in the top 3 for best performing first year partnership;
- In partnership with, Public Health colleagues and Apex Multisports, the Council successfully delivered a 'Fit 4 Fun' healthy eating and physical activity programme to Year 4 pupils to Watford Schools.
- The Council continues to deliver Herts Youth Games which is aimed at introducing young people to new sports and link them with local clubs, with the overall objective being to celebrate youth sport with the emphasis very much on taking part. The Games seek to raise the profile of sport, to promote the development of coaches, leaders and volunteers, and also to encourage sporting attitudes of health, fun, fair play and enjoyment of participation.
- Successful Community Sport activation funding application to Sport England for just under £300,000 over 3 years. This project will enable Watford Borough Council to enhance sporting provision in the most deprived borough ward; Watford Central and allow development and delivery of interventions for target-specific groups which will overcome key participant barriers and increase engagement in sport amongst young people and adults aged 14+. This will be done through targeted sports provision.

With the expiry of the Sports Development Framework in 2014, it also seemed an opportune time to examine how the Council wished to use the resources for the future to maximise our sports offer. It offers an opportunity to also look wider at options as to how we can collectively work together on a strategic vision for sport that can maximise all of our resources.

In 2014, the Council also commissioned a **Property Review** to assess a range of issues relating to its property portfolio:-

Issue 1- To review the current property investment portfolio and its performance commercially in the context of the council's objectives recommending any rebalancing of the portfolio required.

Issue 2- To review the council's land holdings which are held for development and report on the soundness of potential development plans. Details of the properties will be provided to the successful bidder

Issue 3- To review the council's operational properties and future requirements which should highlight opportunities to rationalise and release development or sale opportunities.

Issue 4- To advise the council outlining options to establish a fit for purpose governance and property management structure to deliver the asset management strategy recommending a programme implementation and timetable options.

Issue 5- To propose specific portfolio management initiatives and set targets and stretch targets for properties with the objective of generating a minimum of 5% increases overall in commercial revenue per annum from its existing baseline in each of the next three years (2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17).

The impact of the review may impact on a number of properties that currently provide a sport and recreational provision on a range of sites – whether an isolated building or a whole site.

The **Local Plan (Core Strategy)** contains policies on Green Infrastructure, Sport and Recreation and was found sound by the Planning Inspectorate in the autumn of 2012, and was adopted in January 2013. In particular, Policy GI4 (Sport and Recreation) of the Local Plan (Core Strategy) states that the council will work in partnership with local sports clubs and organisations as well as take forward the concept of strategic sports sites recommended within the KCA sports study (see later). The intention behind the Core Strategy was to develop this approach with further detail on strategic sports sites in Local Plan Part 2 (LP2) which contains detailed planning policies and site allocations that support the Core Strategy.

The consultation document for LP2 set out a proposed policy on strategic sports sites (Sports Hubs). Policy GI6 also identified the proposed boundaries of the four sites.

Policy GI6 (Sports Hubs) in summary set out to support the development of improved sports facilities on the four proposed strategic sports sites whilst at the same time protecting these strategic sports sites against development for other land uses (unless there was no clear need demonstrated for the sports site in question). Feedback from this first consultation on LP2, whilst supportive of investment in sport, contained quite strong concerns on the lack of reference in Policy GI6 to Green Belt policy given that three of the four strategic sports sites are located in the Green Belt. This initial concern for the strategic sports sites approach also arose due to the lack of information about exactly what type of investment and what facilities were proposed on the four sites given that there are often significant planning issues

arising from the proposal of facilities such as new floodlighting and new changing facilities on sports grounds, especially in the Green Belt. Paragraph 81 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) specifically supports outdoor sports provision in the green belt and green belt designation does not prevent all forms of development but is intended to serve the specific purposes set out in the NPPF paragraph 80.

The **Public Health** agenda has also significantly changed recently. Local authorities have been given renewed responsibility for public health as part of the health and social care reforms introduced in April 2013, alongside dedicated funding and new public health outcomes framework. This now poses significant challenges for Local Authorities. One area highlighted is the impact access to green and open spaces and leisure can have on public health.

So why then **does** Watford need this Sports Facilities Strategy?

This is therefore no longer just about the quantity and quality of sports facilities in Watford. It needs to embrace a wide range of potentially conflicting objectives in relation to sports development, national vs local priorities, local and national planning issues, the widening concerns on public health and the Council's responsibility as well as the range of sport and recreation properties that the council is currently responsible for.

This new 10 Year **Sports Facilities Strategy** therefore needs to set out the following:

- Propose a number of "guiding principles" for the Council and its key partners;
- Develop a number of "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.

These need to be underpinned by the following key objectives:-

1. To establish a clear understanding of the **current and future needs for sports facilities** in the borough through engagement with relevant organisations and groups and analysis of both the national and local context;
2. To **confirm the location of strategic sites** where future support and investment should be targeted and the areas where there is scope to disinvest to secure a more sustainable provision across the borough;
3. To understand the contribution of good quality sports facilities to the wider **public health agenda** and ensure provision matches proposed and **potential programmes of activity**;
 - To ensure synergy between the provision of sport facilities and the council's wider **property review** and its retained property portfolio;
 - To ensure synergy between the provision of sport facilities and the council's

- Local Plan 2** and potential impact on green belt within Watford's boundary;
- To ensure the delivery of a long-term sports facilities strategy that sets the strategic direction for sports in the borough both in terms of good quality facilities that meets **current and future needs** but also in terms of the activities that will be encouraged through these sites; and
 - To provide the framework to enable clubs / groups and the Council to **exploit funding opportunities** and their potential.

This strategy 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”.



2. A NUMBER OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This Sports Facilities Strategy cuts across many boundaries and involves a significant number of stakeholders with different roles and priorities. Therefore a number of guiding principles need to be defined in relation to these roles:-

The Role of the Council is:-

- 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 the delivery of the strategy in partnership with stakeholders with the Council leading on the co-ordination, enabling and delivery of the actions arising from this strategy;
- To ensure that, in our role as the local planning authority, we support the delivery of the strategy by ensuring that the delivery of the Local Plan and decisions on planning applications are consistent with this strategy’s aims and objectives and action plan proposals;
- 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; and
- 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 is:-

- 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 is:-

- 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; and
- 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 Partnerships (Herts Sports Partnership and Active Watford) is:-

- As the County Sports Partnership and Community Sports Network respectively to assist in the delivery of the strategy through their enabling and partnership development roles.

The Role of Local Competitive Sports Leagues is:-

- 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 and Colleges is:-

- 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.



3. THE STATE OF OUTDOOR SPORTS PROVISION IN WATFORD – CURRENT KEY ISSUES

Sporting Contrasts within Watford

There are two broad groups of sports clubs in Watford, those that are thriving and those that are struggling. Those that are flourishing include the two rugby clubs, the hockey club and the two tennis clubs with their own sites. These clubs 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 wholly on the Council.

However, many of the cricket and football clubs, 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. Several 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 are likely to be approaching non-viability. Three of them however, were granted leases and are now responsible for their own maintenance and as a consequence, the quality of their sites has generally improved although membership numbers still remain a concern.

Only Sun Postal Sports Club, West Herts Sports Club and Cassiobury Tennis Club own their sites, although Fullerians RUFC and West Herts Golf Club have long term leases with the Council.

The Location and Size of Pitches

Nearly all the pitches that the Council own and manage are located in parks, including Cassiobury Park, Woodside Playing Fields, King George V Playing Fields, Callowland Recreation Ground, Harebreaks Recreation Ground, Knutsford Playing Fields and Radlett Road Playing Fields. When they are being used for a booked sports 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 for the Council to offset their ongoing maintenance.

In relation to size of pitches, a number of the cricket, football and rugby pitches in Watford 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 often ignore the issue 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 are encouraging councils to provide a range of pitch sizes; this will have significant land use and possibly financial implications for the Council.

The Quality of Pitches and Other Outdoor Facilities

Many of Watford's cricket, football and rugby pitches (including the outfields for cricket pitches) are sloping or bumpy or wrongly oriented as well as drain poorly. Many football pitches also have bare goalmouths year round.

The only artificial cricket wickets in the Borough (at Watford Town Cricket Club 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. Some of the Council's cricket pitches also require better infrastructure such as watering systems for squares and sightscreens.

The existing grass tennis courts at Cassiobury Park are very poor and most of the hard tennis courts in parks are average and do not appear to be well used (Oxhey Playing Fields, Lea Farm Rec, Cassiobury Park and North Watford Playing Fields).

The Use of Council Facilities

The average use of the Council's football pitches for which details were available were based on the 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 this season, the average use of the Council's cricket pitches was only 0.78 matches per week. However, 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. At the same time, the Council is doing nothing to promote the use of its open access tennis courts, despite increased usage in the summer months. A number of football pitches have also since been decommissioned since 2012 and include Waterfields Rec, Watford Fields and Leavesden Green Rec without impacting on overall usage rates. However, the significant peaking of usage is still a major issue every season.

Council Leases

Several of the bowls clubs have 15-year leases of their sites from the Council but they have only 12-13 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 and many of the national governing bodies require more. Smaller projects may however require only seven years tenure. Several other clubs have indicated that 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. This is not unusual with a Borough the size of Watford and the level of mobility of its residents. Cross boundary usage in either direction is difficult to assess and where there are deficiencies, facilities in adjacent authorities become important.

The Cost of Pitch Hire

The Council's pitches are less expensive than those in neighbouring local authority areas, but some clubs still 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 Borough has three artificial turf pitches (ATPs), at Woodside Playing Fields, 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. Only ATP's that are designed to FIFA 1* performance standards can be used for competitive matches. At present there are none in Watford.

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. However, several 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 and there is a lack of flexibility with many clubs (eg the Sunday League is fixed). 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 Football Club is now playing all of its home matches on a 3G pitch since its move to Cophall Stadium.

The Lack of Training and Practice Facilities

There are no floodlit grass football pitches in Watford (with the exception of Sun Postal FC which is private) and some teams do no midweek training, although some do 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 also a lack of decent quality floodlit multi-courts – ideally linked to community centres or schools, although some new facilities have been introduced at Radlett Road Playing Fields, Callowland Rec and Leavesden Green Recreation Ground but without floodlighting to most. There are also plans for a new multi use games area on an artificial turf pitch at the Meriden Community Centre in 2015, by Watford Football Club. Some of the Council's pitches are used for training but it derives no income from this use and the wear and tear is exacerbated by this use.

The Quality of Changing Facilities

The changing pavilions at Woodside Playing Fields (cricket and football), Callowland Rec (football), Oxhey Park (football and Gaelic Games), Harebreaks Rec (football), and Cassiobury Park do not meet current standards. In several of them referees have to share showers or changing with players. Although Callowland Rec has recently been refurbished as has Garston Park changing rooms, Woodside Playing Fields are still in very poor condition whilst at Cassiobury Park the changing rooms are also too far from car parking and the pitches. The latter at Cassiobury will be relocated as part of the proposed Parks for People HLF / BIG Lottery refurbishment of the park.

The pitches at Harwoods Recreation Ground, Radlett Road Playing Fields and Leggatts Campus, have no changing accommodation. KGV Playing Field lacks proper social accommodation for cricket usage despite the presence of Holywell Community Centre. Of the Council pitch sites, only the changing rooms at KGV Playing Fields can be used by both male and female players at the same time. At best, disabled accessibility to pavilions across the Borough is poor.

Club Development across Watford

Despite continued work and initiatives by the Council, the number of clubs with any form of accreditation in the Borough is still very low at 18. 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. The majority of the football clubs and a number of the cricket clubs have only one adult team and are economically fragile at best although youth football is relatively vibrant. Many of the football and cricket clubs also lack ambition – they are mainly groups of friends that enjoy a weekly game but aren't particularly interested about improving their skills. Only a small number of (Saturday & Sunday) 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. Likewise there are no clear pathways from youth to adult football and very few adult football clubs have links to youth ones or schools such as the football academies at the Queens School and Parmiter's School. Very few clubs have

development plans and most are not planning for the future - they are simply surviving. Within Watford, the only true community football clubs are Everett Rovers and Sun Postal FC.

In Watford, West Herts is the only multi-sports club that exists. 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 as they lack resources and there is no obvious spare affordable land in the Borough.

Among the larger clubs, Watford Town Cricket Club, Fullarians Rugby Club, Glen Rovers GAA Club and West Herts Hockey Club all wish to expand and develop new changing and clubhouse accommodation but lack the funds to allow them to develop it or take forward.

The Viability of Clubs across Watford

The viability of clubs across Watford is often restricted by lack of ownership of sites as well as short term leases in place. Only Sun Postal FC, Cassiobury Tennis Club, Herts Bowling Club and West Herts Sports Club own their sites, although Fullarians RUFC has a long lease with the Council.

A number of the football clubs are dependent on volunteers and 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, particularly those that are using Council facilities in existing parks. As a result, smaller clubs in all sports are likely to increasingly struggle for players, volunteers and funding. The feedback received from many players cites the 5-a-side soccer centre at Queens School, Bushey, which 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.

The town’s rugby clubs are however, 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.

In relation to tennis, The West Herts and Cassiobury Tennis Clubs are thriving whilst Grosvenor Tennis Club in Cassiobury Park is not.

Girls and Women’s Sport

Within the borough, there is very little girls’ and women’s cricket, football or rugby. Sun Postal FC amongst the men’s football clubs has a women’s team as well as Garston Ladies who also run a thriving youth girls football with a team in all age groups. Glen Rovers GAA Gaelic Games Club are currently developing a female team. Opportunities are therefore very limited and are exacerbated by a lack of changing facilities suitable for female usage.

Teenage Sport

Significantly, teenage cricket and football appears to be in decline across the town and this will have a knock-on impact on adult participation in due course and further

exacerbates the current situation.

Pitch Costs and Subsidy Levels

At present, the Council lacks information on the operating costs of many of its outdoor facilities, particularly pitches and therefore the extent to which we are subsidising sports such as cricket and football and whether pitches are real value for money. Generally speaking, however, pitches nationally are the most highly subsidised of all publicly provided sports facilities on a subsidy per user basis. Basic costs are highlighted below in the table:-

- Installing drainage to a poor quality pitch - £ 40,000
- New two team changing facility - £250,000
- Annual maintenance - £ 10,000

Sport England's "Protecting Playing Fields" programme can provide grants of up to £100,000 for Local Authorities and up to £65,000 for other providers towards these costs. 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 continued investment in grass pitches is not considered good value for money.

A third generation (3G) ATP can cost between £600-£800,000 (depending on size and specification) 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.

(Figures provided by Kit Campbell Associates 2012)

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 throughout the week; it also results in very low overall occupancy of most pitches except on a Sunday morning when they are at capacity. Promoting more mid-week participation would reduce the peaking of demand and ideally allow a reduced but more cost-effective pattern of provision, although would require more floodlit grass

or 3G pitches as it would not be possible to transfer without floodlit pitches even if leagues and clubs were supportive.

Indoor Sports Provision

The 2012 Facilities Study concentrated on assessing the range, quality and accessibility of outdoor sports facilities and to a lesser extent, indoor sports provision. The emphasis is on outdoor sports facilities as there has been significant investment in indoor facilities within the two leisure centres at Central and Woodside. As a result, the Borough Council's excellent leisure centres are extremely well used. However, the Study did raise a number of issues which are highlighted below:-

Quantity and Quality Issues

1. Watford has the highest provision in Hertfordshire of indoor bowls rinks per 1000 residents; the second highest health and fitness provision; the second lowest provision of sports halls and swimming pools; and it is one of three Hertfordshire Councils with no indoor tennis provision. However, this does not necessarily mean that the level of provision of halls, pools and indoor tennis courts is inadequate.

Active Places Power also has a supply-demand tool for indoor bowls rinks, sports halls and swimming pools which suggests that the supply-demand balance is currently being met.

Watford has more than enough of each of these facilities. It has a higher level of provision than in England as a whole and also more indoor bowls halls and swimming pool provision than the average for the Eastern Region. Given that Hertsmeire and Three Rivers have a higher level of sports hall and pool provision per 1,000 residents than Watford it is very unlikely that there is a deficiency in provision in these areas and therefore no need for Watford facilities to have to import significant demand from adjoining areas. Furthermore, while Watford has no indoor tennis courts, the level of provision in Hertfordshire as a whole is one third higher than the East of England average and double the English average. The nearest courts are at the commercial David Lloyd Club in Bushey (13 courts) or the pay and play Batchwood Tennis Centre in St Albans (7 courts; recently rebuilt after a fire). As a result indoor tennis provision for Watford is a low priority for the Council.

2. Most of the indoor sports facilities in and around Watford have opened in the past decade. This means that Borough residents have access to a range of modern facilities that are generally in good condition and fit for purpose. The qualitative audit carried out in 2012 showed that the two Borough Council public facilities consistently scored the highest in the audit. However, all of the other facilities with the exception of Fuller Life and Shapers also scored well.

3. The Borough has a good set of recently opened indoor sports facilities. The mix of community and joint use facilities means that almost all Watford residents live within easy travel of at least one sports hall or pool.
4. The Borough Council facilities are extremely well used and have little spare capacity. However, the joint use of school facilities could all 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 potential use would be to increase the amount of training time available to the Watford Swimming Club.
5. There does seem to be a need for a specialist gymnastics hall with training pits. The Club is large enough to operate a specialist gymnastics hall and should be able to achieve at least break-even, although it could not raise the funds needed to build one. A specialist gymnastics training hall in Watford is likely to benefit not only the Dolphina Club but also other clubs based in north London and Hertfordshire.

Other Sports

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. **Boxing** was recently catered for at Sun Postal FC but with the end of their current lease, new accommodation has been made available at Woodside Playing Fields within a redundant sports hall. **Gaelic Games** are popular in Watford with Glen Rovers GAA Gaelic Games Club, based at Oxhey Park. The development of the Health Campus Project will however impact on their facilities and with the closure of the Irish Centre, a new base is being developed at Radlett Road Playing Fields with a County size pitch and four-room changing facility. This will bring back into use redundant playing fields which were closed due to poor playing surface and lack of drainage.

4. PLANNING POLICY ISSUES INCLUDING GREEN BELT

Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy has been developed with policies on Green Infrastructure, Sport and Recreation. Following extensive public consultation, it was found to be sound by the Government in the autumn of 2012, and was adopted in January 2013. Of particular note, Policy GI4 (Sport and Recreation) of the Core Strategy states that the Council will work in partnership with local sports clubs and organisations. It also advocates the concept of the four strategic sports sites which were recommended as part of the study by KCA. The intention behind the Core Strategy is to develop this approach with further detail on strategic sports sites in Local Plan Part 2 (LP2) which contains detailed planning policies and site allocations that support the Core Strategy.

Local Plan (Part 2)

The consultation document for LP2 set out a proposed policy on the concept of strategic sports sites (Policy GI6).

The outcome of the consultation on LP2 suggested that further work was required on:

- Developing the Sports Facilities Strategy further;
- Reconsidering the wording of Policy GI6 (including the original term of Sports Hubs) to be more sensitive to the potential conflict with Green Belt policy when proposals for sports facilities are made to the Council. Further consultation on proposed changes to LP2 is programmed for Autumn 2014 and this could include a revised version of Policy GI6 with greater reference to Green Belt policy;
- An alternative approach to be considered could be to omit the strategic sports site policy from the Local Plan and rely on this Sports Facilities Strategy to deliver improved sports facilities in these areas. Green Belt policy and open space policies would still apply for the four areas;
- There may be a need to consider the need for longer term changes to the Green Belt boundary in Watford. This may be a subject that is appropriately addressed in the next revision of the Local Plan (Core Strategy).

National Green Belt Policy

Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) explains national Green Belt policy.

The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF specifically states:

“A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.....”

Current Sports Provision Planning Issues

There are three major issues ongoing in Watford at the current time that will impact on sports provision in the borough:

- Relocation of Glen Rovers GAA Gaelic Games Club

The relocation of the Gaelic Games Club from Oxhey Park to Radlett Road Playing Fields was the subject of a planning application that was approved in mid 2014. The impact of this relocation on the Colne Valley corridor (Colne River Park), which is Green Belt, needs to be carefully integrated, along with any future proposals for this area.

- Commercial Multi Activity Sports Centre options

In Europe a new trend is emerging whereby sports companies trading in sports equipment also link up with gardening centres and new sports facilities to offer a retail and leisure activities experience, which brings in new investment and sporting activity into the area. If this was a direction the Council wished to help facilitate then the space required to deliver this would be unlikely to be found in Watford alone and would therefore involve working with our neighbours in Hertsmere or Three Rivers. Any such proposal would be likely to impact on the Green Belt.

- Development of the Fullerians RFC / Sun Postal FC / Watford Boys Grammar School site to the west of the Cassiobury Estate

This particular site has a number of public and private users including Fullerians RFC, Watford Boys Grammar School, Sun Postal FC and Herts Bowling Club with each club

and user having specific needs and aspirations. For example, Fullarians RFC are keen to improve their Club House and changing facilities whilst the Grammar School have developed new changing facilities during 2014. Cassiobury Tennis Club have also indicated an interest to relocate to this location with indoor and outdoor facilities an aspiration.

In 2013/14 the Draft Local Plan Part 2 was consulted upon in relation to sports facilities development proposals that may affect Green Belt areas, in particular King George V Playing Fields, the River Colne Corridor and Cassiobury Park / Fullarians site. Feedback from the early consultation raised some concerns relation to the impact of any proposed development on these sites. As many outdoor sports facilities fall within Green Belt areas, their Council therefore requires a clear planning policy for the retention and enhancement of pitches and other sports facilities in the Borough and in particular in Green Belt areas.

From initial site visits (undertaken in June 2014) of the proposed strategic sports sites it is clear that issues are likely to arise in the future with regard to the improvement of club house buildings and infrastructure, the introduction of additional floodlighting and the construction of new pitch facilities (including covered areas), that will have quite significant Green Belt policy implications when taken to the planning application stage.

Property issues

In March 2014, the Council also commissioned a Property Review to assess the capacity, condition and opportunities in relation to its property portfolio. This includes all the buildings and facilities associated with outdoor sports and in particular changing rooms, pavilions, depots and Woodside Playing Fields complex. The feedback from this review will be taken into consideration in delivering this strategy and in particular its recommendations for the proposed Strategic Sites. I



5. THE WAY FORWARD – DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY AND SETTING STRATEGIC GOALS

Aim of the Strategy

This 10 year Sports Facilities Strategy is based on the robust evidence base carried out in 2012 by Kit Campbell Associates on the state of sport in Watford and has been used to inform all future decisions about the prioritisation, provision and funding of sports facilities in the Borough which has been used to develop the Action Plan in Section 8. This 10 year strategy highlights deficiencies and opportunities for improvement, and sets the context for future decisions about the priority and delivery of local sports facilities up to 2025. It will ensure that the best use of resources will be achieved and will play a vital role in shaping and delivering Watford's agreed approach to sports facilities at the local and wider level. In addition, the long-term timescale for this strategy means that it provides a clear direction for accommodating future demand and changing patterns of use.

A number of strategic goals have therefore been proposed linked to the more detailed Action Plan in Section 8.

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. The Rugby Football Union (RFU), 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 (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. 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; and
- The Rugby Football Union is actively promoting Rugby Sevens, Tag and Touch in an attempt to reverse the recent decline in participation.



6. Outdoor sports provision - facilities

Timescale definitions

Short term – 24 months

Medium term – 2 – 5 years

Long Term – 5 years +

Site	Timescale	Action
STRATEGIC SPORTS SITE #1 RIVER COLNE EAST (incorporating Radlett Road Playing Fields / Knutsford Playing Fields / Watford RUFC / Glen Rovers GAA / Top Golf – The Colne River Park)	Short term	Relocation for impacted facilities at Oxhey Park and protect site through the planning system. Prepare a masterplan for development as a strategic sports site
	Medium term	Community Park Community Rugby Club at WRFC (as existing)
	Long Term	Assist Glen Rovers and WRFC if they wish to develop or enhance their facilities further
STRATEGIC SPORTS SITE #2 CASSIOBURY SITE WEST (incorporating Fullerians RFC / Sun Postal FC / Watford Grammar School / Herts Bowls – Indoor and outdoor / Hockey)	Short term	Protect the site through the planning system. Approach Sun Postal, Fullerians RUFC, Cassiobury Lawn Tennis Club and the Grammar School and seek their agreement to the preparation of a masterplan / planning framework for the site that includes a 3G pitch designed for rugby and football, better drainage and an artificial cricket wicket, with potential access from Bellmount Wood Avenue.
	Medium term	Regional Park Strategic sports site, ideally with a community multi-sports club offering cricket, football, hockey, tennis, bowls (indoor & outdoor) and rugby.
	Long Term	Help the local clubs and school deliver the masterplan

<p>STRATEGIC SPORTS SITE #3 HOLYWELL SOUTH (incorporating King George V Playing Fields, W3RT/ Watford Cycle Hub / Schools / Football / Cricket)</p>	<p>Short term</p>	<p>Protect the site through the planning system. Prepare a masterplan for development as a strategic sports site</p>
	<p>Medium term</p>	<p>Regional Park Strategic sports site with cricket and grass football pitches and a floodlit 3G ATP and redeveloped accommodation / clubhouse / sports pavilion</p>
	<p>Long term</p>	<p>Implement the masterplan</p>
<p>STRATEGIC SPORTS SITE #4 WOODSIDE NORTH (incorporating Woodside Playing Fields, Leisure Centre / SLM / WTCC / Bowls - Indoor and outdoor / Football / Cricket / Boxing / Schools)</p>	<p>Short term</p>	<p>Protect the site through the planning system. Draw up a masterplan for the site with four main components:</p> <p>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 a possible partnership between 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 Community Sports 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.</p> <p>To investigate with the FA/Herts FA and users, the conversion of the existing ATP adjacent to the Leisure Centre into three enclosed smaller pitches with a 3G surface. At present the</p>

		<p>100x60 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.</p> <p>A full size floodlit 3G ATP in the eastern part of the site to be managed from the Woodside Leisure Centre</p> <p>New forms of provision for small-sided cricket and hockey (to be planned in partnership with the relevant governing bodies)</p>
	Medium term	<p>Regional Park (Green Flag status)</p> <p>Strategic Sports Site</p>
	Long Term	<p>Deliver the masterplan</p> <p>Demolish the existing cricket club pavilion. Develop a new or refurbished depot for the Council</p>
Callowland Recreation Ground	Short term	<p>Protect the park through the planning system.</p> <p>Support the Bowls Club in promoting its facilities and increasing membership</p>
	Medium term	<p>Community Park</p>
	Long term	<p>Take the pitches out of operation once it is possible to accommodate the current demand on other sites as soon as replacement football capacity is available on new ATPs elsewhere across the Borough and when Sunday morning peak usage is addressed.</p>

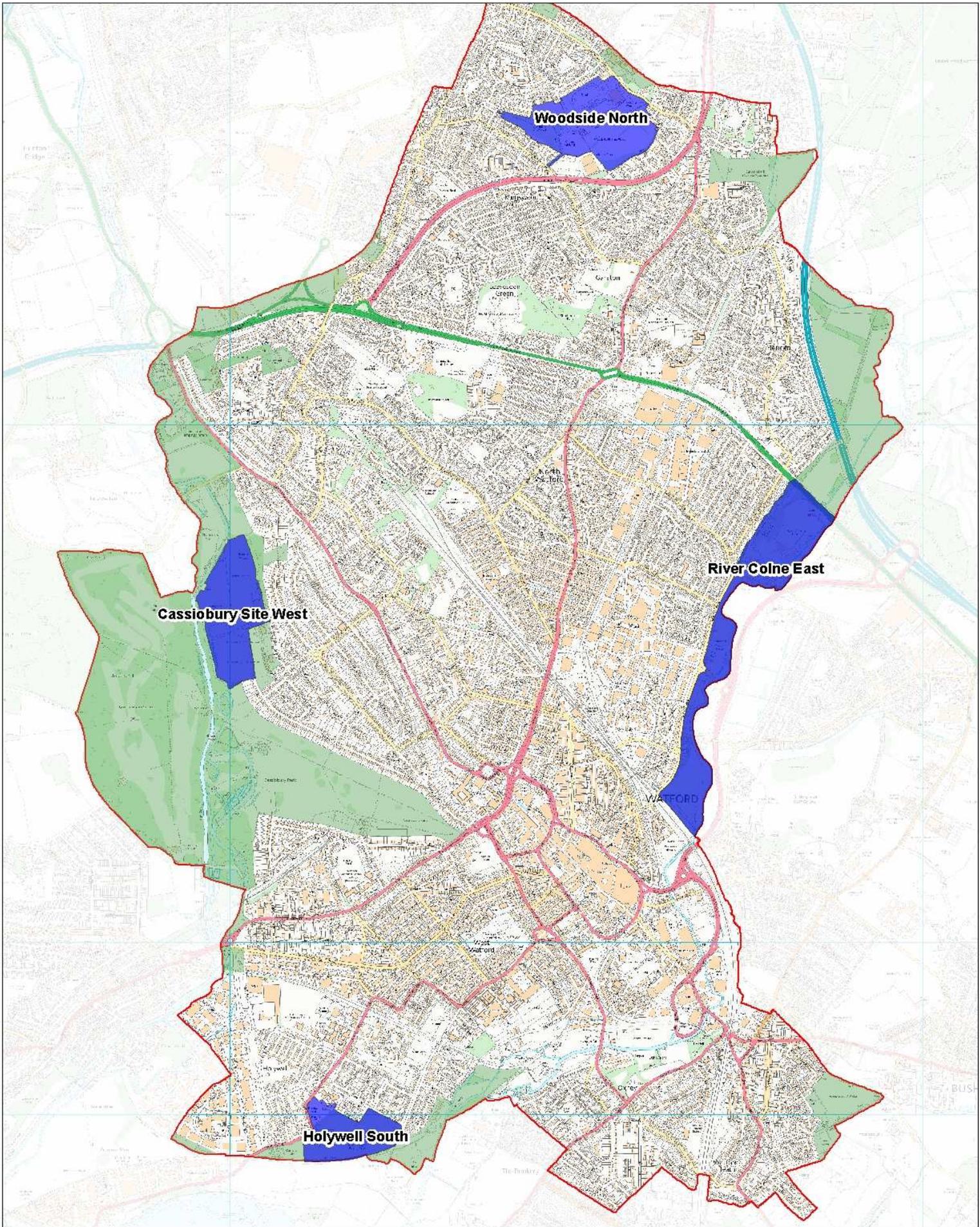
Cassiobury Park	Short term	Protect all parts of the park through the planning system. Support the Croquet Club, Grosvenor Tennis Club, West Herts Golf Club and the Bowls Club in promoting its facilities and increasing membership as part of the wider HLF/BIG funded restoration of Cassiobury Park.
	Medium term	Regional park (Green Flag status)
	Long term	Consider the removal or reduction of the football pitches, as soon as replacement football capacity is available on new ATPs elsewhere across the Borough and when Sunday morning peak usage is addressed.
Garston Park	Short term	Enhance the park through the planning system. Remove the football pitch as soon as replacement football is available on new ATPs elsewhere across the Borough and when Sunday morning peak usage is addressed.
	Medium term	Local Park
Harebreaks Recreation Ground	Medium term	Local Park Enhance the park through the planning system. 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 as soon as replacement football capacity is available on new ATPs elsewhere across the Borough and when Sunday morning peak usage is addressed.
	Long term	Assist Herons Youth FC to develop

Leggatts Campus	Short term	Protect the site through the planning system. Ensure that local developers provide Everett Rovers FC with a suitable changing pavilion through a planning obligation (CIL/S106) as well as improve parking on the site.
	Medium term	Community cricket and football club
	Long Term	Assist Everett Rovers FC to develop.
Oxhey Park	Short term	Protect the park through the planning system and require compensatory provision when the proposed Health Campus link road affects the sports facilities
	Medium term	Community Park Grass pitch site for Gaelic Games & football relocated & work up proposals for the use of remaining area.
West Herts Sports Club	Short term	No action
	Medium term	Community sports club with cricket, football and squash (as now)
	Long term	Assist the club if it wishes to develop or enhance its facilities further
Westfield Community College	Short term	Protect the site through the planning system
North Watford Playing Fields	Short term	Protect the site through the planning system. Re-provide football pitch at this location to offset the loss of pitch at Oxhey Park. Improve tennis courts

Lea Farm Recreation Ground	Short term	Protect the site through the planning system. Improve tennis courts. Support the Bowls Club in promoting its facilities and increasing membership.
Meriden Park	Short term	Protect the site through the planning system Supporting Watford FC in its ambitions to improve community sports facilities including the MUGA.

Ideally, Parmiter’s, Francis Combe and Queens Schools could become Strategic Sports Sites serving clubs from Watford, Three Rivers and Hertsmere as they offer good quality indoor and outdoor facilities that are used by the local community or could be used further. There is already 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 could formally approach Three Rivers, Hertsmere, the County Council and the two schools to plan and deliver partnership developments at the three 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. Bushey Academy’s facilities have also been significantly improved with the recently built sports centre and enhanced playing fields offering a greater potential for meeting needs in Watford and Bushey than the original school facilities. This is significant in view of the site’s close proximity to the district boundary.

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.



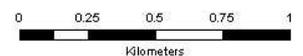
Strategic Sports Sites

Strategic Sports Sites
 Green Belt

Produced by ER, Planning Policy June 2014



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7. DELIVERY

There are three main elements to the delivery of this Sports Facilities Strategy: planning, developing partnerships and funding.

The key findings 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; suitable provision of floodlit artificial turf pitches suitable for football and 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, despite low membership numbers, 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.

However.....

In the light of these findings, and the previous aims of the Council's Sports Development Framework, the strategy proposes **five main courses of action** with land use implications:

- The development of four "**strategic sports sites**" in the Borough – **Woodside North** (Woodside Playing Fields in the north of the Borough); **Cassiobury Site West** (the Sun Postal Football Club/Fullerians Rugby Club site in the centre of the Borough adjacent to the Cassiobury Estate); **River Colne East** (the Colne River Park corridor to the east of the Borough); and **Holywell South** (the KGV Playing Fields in the south of the Borough). Each of these sites should 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 ATPs and minimise the need for grass pitches as they require high levels of subsidy per player
- The potential joint development of additional strategic sports sites at Parmiter's and Queens Schools, subject to the agreement of the schools, the County Council and the adjoining councils;
- The protection of existing and currently used playing pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens within schools, parks and clubs – (consistent with paragraph 74 of the NPPF); and

- The removal and disinvestment of pitches from parks as additional pitch capacity becomes available at the strategic pitch sites.
- The Local Plan to reflect the findings and proposals of this Sports Facilities Strategy and to incorporate the consolidation and improvement of sports facilities to create strategic sports sites in the agreed locations and through S106 and CIL contributions to ensure that the Council's CIL charging schedule refers to sports facilities in the Regulation 123 list. Further sports policy detail to be provided at a lower level in the Local Plan. This will 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 including the impact on Green Belt and proposals in relation to the review of Green Belt policy in Watford.

Further detailed planning policy issues will be set out in Part 2 of the Local Plan (Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPDs). Local Plan 2 will set out the policies that will apply to each of the Strategic Sites and other key sites referred to within this strategy.

Developing Partnerships

It is simply not realistic to expect the Council to deliver this alone. Instead, it will have to work in partnership with a range of agencies including local clubs, schools, county and national sports governing bodies, the Herts Sports Partnership and potential funding agencies to ensure the future health of sport and recreation in the Borough.

Accordingly it should:

- Seek the support of potential partners for the delivery of this Sports Facilities Strategy;
- Establish a steering group to deliver and monitor the strategy that will meet every six months and will have representatives from the Council and stakeholders with a key strategic role such as pitch sport governing bodies, Active Watford. This group will also monitor changes in needs to ensure the evidence the strategy is based upon is still robust.
- 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; and
- Initiate discussions on the potential partnership developments suggested bearing in mind that they are likely to be long term projects that will depend on significant external funding for their delivery.

Delivering Sports Development

The Sports Development Framework has built on the good work already undertaken by partners, clubs, voluntary sector agencies, individuals, schools and various partnerships. We recommend the same priorities remain which are:-

- Increase community participation in physical activity and sport to contribute towards a healthy town for Watford residents; and
- Develop capacity within the local sporting infrastructure, particularly around clubs, coaches and volunteers, to improve sporting opportunities.

The Council will continue to work in partnership with organisations such as the Community Sports Network; Herts Sports Partnership; Schools Sports Partnership; SLM; National Governing Bodies; and local clubs.

However, the future delivery of sports development in Watford will be informed by the three strategic goals underpinning this Sports Facilities Strategy.

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”.

SG2 - To promote the development of financially sustainable multi-sport clubs offering inclusive opportunities for players of all ages and abilities and both sexes

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 – Sports development provision has successfully moved away from direct provision to one of enabling, commissioning, capacity building, supporting funding bids etc. Evidence has shown that many local sports and clubs are struggling but others are thriving. In order to ensure that the infrastructure is in place for both areas (struggling and thriving), one future emphasis for sports development needs to underpin these three strategic goals and will focus on these areas – in particular the development of the four strategic sports sites and long term encouragement of multi-sports clubs in these locations.

The opportunity with the renewal of the leisure centre contract in 2018 as well as potential partnerships with local community centres should be investigated in relation to opportunities for synergies with regard to future delivery of some sports development activities

Funding

Delivering this strategy will not be easy and will require significant resources, 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 share of the cost itself. The Council currently receives financial contributions through S.106 agreements. However, the planning obligations regime is changing and from April 2015 the Council will operate a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Although sports facilities could be funded using income generated by CIL the amount of money collected is likely to be less than is currently received and such funding will have to compete with other infrastructure requirement.

In addition, the Council could also be willing to allow the transfer of pitch sport demand from one or more existing sites with poor quality pitches and no or poor quality changing accommodation, thereby making it possible to enhance or re-use that site or those sites in ways that will benefit the communities in their vicinity. 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 poor use of limited resources. Some disinvestment will also reduce grounds maintenance costs or – better - allow the Council to spend more on maintaining the strategic sports sites without increasing its overall outdoor sports maintenance revenue budget.

Grant Funding - opportunities exist for securing further funding from external sources such as the Big Lottery Fund and possible Public Health Funding. Successes have included Barclays Spaces for Sport, Live Wire (Sport Unlimited) Government Funding as well as Sport England funding. Throughout the lifespan of the strategy, opportunities will arise through initiatives for securing funding to aid the delivery of the 3 strategic goals. The council will continue to maximise all avenues with its many partners to ensure the strategic outcomes of this 10 years Sports Facilities Strategy.



8.ACTION PLAN

Timescale definitions

Short term – 24 months

Medium term – 2 – 5 years

Long Term – 5 years +



A SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY FOR WATFORD 2015 - 2025

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
1.1	Making Watford a better place to live Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town	Review of Green Belt policy as part of the wider planning context for the strategic sports sites at:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holywell South • River Colne East • Cassiobury Site West 	Planning Policy	S,M	Staff costs Revenue costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater flexibility in opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites • Increased quality of the most important open spaces
1.2	Making Watford a better place to live Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town	Consult and engage with ALL stakeholders, local and regional governing bodies and users at the four strategic sites.	Client Services Comm. & Customer Services	S,M	Staff costs Revenue costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local community empowerment • Efficient use of data and ability to prioritise works more effectively
1.3	Making Watford a better place to live Promoting an	Develop masterplans/ planning frameworks for the strategic sports sites and long term investment plans in consultation with ALL stakeholders; local	Client Services Comm. &	S,M	Staff costs Revenue costs Capital funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased quality of the most important open spaces • Greater flexibility in

A SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY FOR WATFORD 2015 - 2025

	active, cohesive & well informed town	and regional governing bodies and users.	Customer Services			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites Higher level of protection and continued enhancement
1.4	<p>Making Watford a better place to live</p> <p>Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town</p>	Assess the impact of the Property Review in relation to the property portfolio in relation to the strategic sites as well as satellite sites across the town.	Client Services Regen. & Property	S	Staff costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater flexibility in opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites Efficient use of data and ability to prioritise works more effectively

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
1.5	<p>Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town</p> <p>Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town</p>	Assess usage of all pitches annually for cricket, football and rugby to look at ratio of usage, to include schools, clubs and council.	Client Services	S,M,L	<p>Staff costs</p> <p>Revenue costs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient use of data and ability to prioritise works more effectively

A SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY FOR WATFORD 2015 - 2025

	town					
1.6	<p>Making Watford a better place to live</p> <p>Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town</p>	<p>Assess the length of current leases to existing facilities and look at long term aspirations of lessees</p>	<p>Client Services</p> <p>Regen. & Property</p>	S	<p>Staff costs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local community empowerment Greater flexibility in opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites
1.7	<p>Making Watford a better place to live</p> <p>Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town</p>	<p>Develop an investment plan for floodlit 3G ATP locations at the strategic sports sites taking into account the needs of football, rugby and hockey.</p>	<p>Client Services</p>	S,M	<p>Staff costs</p> <p>Revenue costs</p> <p>Capital funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased quality of the most important open spaces
1.8	<p>Making Watford a better place to live</p> <p>Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town</p>	<p>Complete the relocation of Glen Rovers GAA Gaelic Games Club to Radlett Road Playing Fields</p>	<p>Client Services</p>	S	<p>Staff costs</p> <p>Revenue costs</p> <p>Capital funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased quality of the most important open spaces

A SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY FOR WATFORD 2015 - 2025

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
1.9	Making Watford a better place to live Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town	Explore and develop the concept of sustainable multi-sports clubs at the four strategic sports sites engaging with ALL stakeholders including local, regional and national governing bodies.	Client Services Comm. & Customer Services	M,L	Staff costs Revenue costs Capital funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local community empowerment Greater flexibility in opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites Increased usage of open spaces
1.10	Making Watford a better place to live Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town	Investigate options for delivery of sports development framework through partnership delivery with a focus on the 4 strategic sports sites and supporting the delivery for new forms of provision for traditional sports Investigate further opportunities for increasing revenue funding to enhance existing and future sports development initiatives.	Comm. & Customer Services	S,M	Staff costs Revenue costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased usage of open spaces Local community empowerment Greater flexibility in opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites
1.11	Making Watford a better place to	Investigate all opportunities for funding through planning gain and external grant	Planning Policy	M	Staff costs Revenue costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher level of protection and

A SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY FOR WATFORD 2015 - 2025

	live Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town	funding to deliver the three strategic goals	Client Services			continued enhancement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater flexibility in opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites
1.12	Making Watford a better place to live Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town	Develop a proposal for re-investing in tennis facilities at the 4 sites in public parks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oxhey Playing Fields Lea Farm Rec North Watford Playing Fields Cassiobury Park 	Client Services	S	Staff costs Revenue costs Capital funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased quality of the most important open spaces
1.13	Making Watford a better place to live Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town	Investigate the potential provision of extreme sports provision in relation to BMX / Skate boarding in a central location in the borough linked to a centralised Cycle Hub facility that encourages greater use of cycling in Watford.	Client Services	S	Staff costs Revenue costs Capital funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased quality of the most important open spaces Greater flexibility in opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites

A SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY FOR WATFORD 2015 - 2025

1.14	<p>Making Watford a better place to live</p> <p>Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town</p>	<p>Consult and engage with clubs, local governing bodies and users where pitches and facilities are to be taken out of commission and relocation proposals and security of tenure are affected.</p>	<p>Client Services</p>	L	<p>Staff costs</p> <p>Revenue costs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local community empowerment
1.15	<p>Making Watford a better place to live</p> <p>Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town</p>	<p>Continue to develop site specific policies for the strategic sites through the emerging Local Plan 2 and ensure that projects are identified in the Reg 123 list for CIL</p>	<p>Planning Policy</p> <p>Client Services</p>	S,M,L	<p>Staff costs</p> <p>Revenue costs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher level of protection and continued enhancement Greater flexibility in opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites
1.17	<p>Making Watford a better place to live</p> <p>Promoting an active, cohesive & well informed town</p>	<p>Develop Action Plans for satellite sites other than strategic sites to inform site specific actions.</p>	<p>Client Services</p>	M,L	<p>Staff costs</p> <p>Revenue costs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher level of protection and continued enhancement Greater flexibility in opportunities to enhance sports and recreation sites



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