

# Northampton Playing Fields Key Issues and Recommendations Report

## Executive Summary

April 2011



# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This Playing Field Report considers the adequacy of provision within Northampton for:

- Football, including Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs)
- Cricket
- Rugby
- Hockey.

The study updates the Council's existing Playing Pitch Strategy (2005), which identified a mixture of poor quality pitches and unmet demand.

For clarity and readability, the Playing Field Report is split into two sections, specifically:

- Local Needs Assessment Evidence Base
- Playing Fields Key issues and Recommendations Report.

The local needs assessment provides a full background to pitch provision in Northampton, the demand for the identified pitches and an evidence base for the recommended actions. The key issues and recommendations report draws on the key findings of the needs assessment and summarises the actions that it is recommended Northampton Borough Council and partners should adopt in moving forwards.

## Aims and Objectives

The local needs assessment and key issues and recommendations report seek to meet the following aims:

- Provide a robust and up to date picture of supply and demand
- Inform decision making on the need for new and enhanced pitch provision now, as the population grows and as the profile of the population changes
- Support the creation of appropriate policy within the Local Development Framework,
- Guide a strategic and innovative approach to the delivery of playing pitches in the Borough up to 2026, linking with National Governing Bodies (NGBs), regional and local priorities and in the context of the challenging financial environment.

This key issues and recommendations report has been developed following the methodology outlined in 'Towards a Level Playing Field – A Manual for the Production of Playing Pitch Strategies' (TaLPF) (Sport England 2002). It also draws on the principles of National Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17)

'Planning for Open space, Sport and Recreation' (Department for Communities and Local Government 2002).

The delivery of the key issues and recommendations will contribute to the achievement of the Vision, which is:

*“An accessible, high quality and sustainable network of playing fields that provides opportunity for residents of and visitors to Northampton to play pitch sports. The network caters for all standards of play, from grass roots to elite”*

While each sport is considered separately, implementation of recommendations and the delivery of pitches across Northampton is looked at strategically, considering opportunities for partnerships between sports. In addition, the proactive improvement of pitches, the provision of new pitches and potential additional funding through new development is considered.

The key issues are outlined sport by sport. The interrelationship between the sports should also be considered as part of the implementation of these recommendations.

## Football

74% of all pitches in Northampton are grass pitches dedicated to football. The full stock of pitches comprises:

- 92 adult football pitches (of which 88 are available for community use)
- 60 junior football pitches (of which 55 are available for community use)
- 36 mini soccer pitches (of which 34 are available for community use).

In total 177 pitches are available for community use. Northampton Borough Council provides 92 of these which accounts for 52% of the community use provision. A majority of these are located on multi pitch sites. In addition to grass pitches, there are five 3g artificial grass pitches (AGP) suitable for football.

There are 329 formal community teams playing football. While demand for senior football has remained relatively static, there have been recent booms in mini and junior soccer, from 82 teams in total in 2004 / 2005 to 175 teams now. This demand will increase as the population grows.

The Active People 4 Survey (Sport England 2010) indicates that between 5% to 10% of adults currently play football. Play is evenly spread with the exception of one central Output Area (10% to 20%) and one Output Area in the north east (2.1% to 5%). Overall the rate of play is higher than the national average. This is significant as overall residents have a lower propensity to participate in sport than in other areas of the country.

Sport England Market Segmentation (2010) indicates that participation is primarily by young adult males who play team sports on a very regular basis and for competitive reasons. There is limited latent demand for football in the borough.

# Summary of Key Issues for Football

## KEY ISSUE 1

### **There are pressures on junior and mini football pitches but more than sufficient adult pitches to meet current and future requirements**

Analysis of football pitches across the Borough shows adequate provision when all pitches, including provision at the PFI schools, are counted. However, clubs have indicated that the cost of hiring facilities in PFI schools is prohibitive. If the price of pitches at the PFI schools continues to effectively remove them from the supply base, deficiencies occur for mini pitches. Projections up to 2026 intensify the deficiency and show junior pitches will also be affected. These deficiencies could be off set by re-marking some adult pitches but this would only serve as a short term measure. The balance of play, concentration of demand and increased demand as a result of the growth coming to West Northamptonshire will mean there will be a lack of pitches when required. This will start to inhibit club growth.

## KEY ISSUE 2

### **There are changing trends in how football is played and the types of facilities that are required**

3g Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) are now approved for use in competitive games. There is a sufficient supply of pitches currently. Most are booked for training. There is a reluctance to use them for competitions due to the price of hire, fear of injuries and perceived competitive advantage against teams not used to playing on these pitches. However, Northamptonshire County Football Association are keen to encourage their use for competitive games. The pitches can sustain more games per week and kick off times can be more flexible. The identified pressure on existing pitches, the anticipated growth for the area and the net inward migration could mean that the 3g AGP will play an increasing role in meeting needs.

Another changing trend is the move towards 9 v 9 matches which is likely to replace U11 and U12 football. It will become the transition from 7 v 7. This will require new pitches or new markings and goal posts as demand shifts from junior football.

## KEY ISSUE 3

### **The quality of junior and senior pitches which impact upon the long-term capacity of pitches to sustain matches.**

Rectifying pitch quality issues is of greater priority than increasing the amount of pitches available. In some instances clubs are unable to meet league requirements for provision. Lack of changing accommodation and the provision of toilets are highlighted as principal issues, provision is essential if more women and girls are to play and for improving the player and spectator experience.

Maintenance and quality issues have an impact on the capacity of a pitch to meet short and long term demand. Issues raised included damage to surface; quality of equipment e.g. posts, corner-flags; slope and evenness of pitches

and line markings. It is noted that whilst the number of pitches has increased to meet demand pitch maintenance budgets have not. The reluctance to use school pitches, which account for 30% of the stock, means some pitches are required to sustain a level of play over the recommended game numbers. The Council maintains pitches using specialist equipment which they can only afford to employ for three months a year impacting on pitch quality. The informal use of pitches for training in the summer season limits pitch reinstatement times.

**KEY ISSUE 4**

**The pitch booking system has a knock on impact to pitch quality. If the current issues are not addressed they will impact on the long-term capacity of pitches to sustain matches.**

The current booking system is a dated paper based system that requires payment by cash or cheque. It makes for a cumbersome system to manage. Pitch availability and rotations are not easily monitored; some popular pitches are over used while others are underused and several teams are spread across different venues which can restrict club development.

**KEY ISSUE 5**

**There are currently vacant / derelict playing pitches dispersed across the Borough which are fulfilling no recognised sports facilities role in their current format.**

Parklands, Kingsthorpe, St Mary’s former school sites and Southfields Park are single pitch sites, without changing accommodation or associated facilities. Managing them in their current condition is not sustainable in the long term. Their release for other uses has the ability to assist in the delivery of the key issues and recommendations if it leads to investment elsewhere or improves the affordability of and access to PFI school facilities.

## Key Priorities for Football

<b>Football 1</b>	<p>Respond to existing pressures on junior and mini pitches by re-designating surplus adult pitches into junior and mini facilities.</p> <p>The North West, South and East of the Borough, should be the focus for this action. Round Spinney and Errington Park should be considered, as they are positioned in appropriate locations and already provide for a mixture of senior and junior football. Upton County Park could provide further opportunities and the new pitches at St Crispins.</p> <p>Opportunities exist to designate additional junior and mini football pitches at Dallington Park; this is currently a central venue for girls soccer, which is an FA ‘key priority’. Any re-designation of pitches should be undertaken in consultation with clubs.</p>
<b>Football 2</b>	<p>To respond to projected future pressures on pitches, and to maximise the use of existing resources.</p> <p>Review community use arrangements and pricing for PFI and community schools with the aim to secure affordable community use.</p>

	<p>There is a pitch booking system in place that can be used to provide an efficient and centralised approach to booking. Junior clubs in particular prefer local access to pitches and schools provide an important means of resourcing this. Particular pressures are likely to be evident in the North West and North East (junior pitches) and the North West and South (mini pitches).</p> <p>Given the location of projected pressures, access at the following sites should be a priority focus for reviewed arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Millway Primary School</li> <li>• Kingsthorpe Village School PFI school (pitches currently being re-laid but likely to be open for community use)</li> <li>• Northampton High School for Girls</li> <li>• Kingsthorpe College (pitch improvements required)</li> <li>• Kingsthorpe Grove Primary School</li> <li>• Weston Favell School</li> <li>• Boothville Primary School</li> <li>• Northampton School for Boys</li> <li>• The Duston School.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Football 3</b></p>	<p>Review pricing policies and bring PFI pricing in line with averages as published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to the introduction of concessionary rates for Charter Standard Clubs. This would encourage the development of high quality club environments and is a key priority of the FA moving forwards.</p>
<p><b>Football 4</b></p>	<p>Given the surplus in adult pitch provision, provide junior and mini football pitches at the new St Crispin Playing Fields (currently being prepared in the South area) to address existing and future shortfalls in this type of provision.</p>
<p><b>Football 5</b></p>	<p>Work in partnership with the Northamptonshire FA to promote 3g AGP pitch use for competitive adult and junior football. Those 3g pitches located in areas of higher deficiency should be promoted for formal match play, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Duston School</li> <li>• Thomas Beckett School</li> <li>• Weston Favell School Sports Centre</li> </ul> <p>Pitches at the Duston School will be particularly important in the event of population growth, as this is located between two major areas of housing development.</p>
<p><b>Football 6</b></p>	<p>Support the development of the planned 3g AGP at St James CEVA School and ensure that community use of the facility is negotiated. Any further additional AGP provision should be located to the South or West of the Borough, in the Upton area, to accommodate demand from the areas of high population growth.</p>

<b>Football 7</b>	Work alongside the FA and the John Henry League to identify an appropriate way of delivering 9 v 9 football in Northampton.
<b>Football 8</b>	<p>Provide changing accommodation at principal NBC pitch sites, and support the development of changing facilities at other sites. Priority locations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acre Lane Playing Fields (large multi pitch site with no changing accommodation)</li> <li>• Parklands Recreation Ground (large multi pitch site with no changing accommodation – FA priority)</li> <li>• Northampton Academy (currently under discussion with the FA).</li> </ul> <p>New developments providing outdoor sports facilities should include changing facilities that meet recognised quality standards.</p>
<b>Football 9</b>	<p>High quality maintenance of pitches for NBC is an ongoing challenge.</p> <p>Football 2 seeks to maximise the use of existing resources meaning that S106 contributions may not always be required to provide new facilities where improvements to existing facilities could be more appropriate. For example, securing capital investment for the laying out and maintenance of pitches; the purchase of specialist maintenance equipment and for the development and application of new management regimes will maximise pitch quality and ensure long-term sustainability.</p> <p>Seek to improve the quality of Council pitches by securing levels of investment to improve the quality of pitches and their long term maintenance.</p> <p>Funds from the capital receipt raised on the disposal of the surplus school sites (Parklands, Kingsthorpe, and St Marys) and / or S106 contributions from development, could be used to finance this.</p>
<b>Football 10</b>	Continue to work with users of NBC pitches through the existing playing pitch forum for league representatives to improve pitch provision in the Borough and to understand the key issues that are arising.
<b>Football 11</b>	Review pitch booking methods to ensure a strategic approach is taken to pitch bookings. This should ensure that pitches are rotated, and set a maximum allowance (suggest 2 games per pitch/week) to promote more consistent use of all pitches.
<b>Football 12</b>	Replace the existing paper based system with an on-line tool enabling clubs to book pitches and pay for pitches electronically. This will improve monitoring of pitch usage trends, as well as cancellations and other issues and promote strategic management of the overall pitch stock.
<b>Football 13</b>	Establish a strategy for booking that promotes the development of club bases (i.e. all teams in a club playing at one site). This may involve the relocation of some teams.

<b>Football 14</b>	<p>As part of the planning consent for Parklands, Kingsthorpe and St Mary's, the capital receipt raised from the disposal of their pitches is to be reinvested into pitch quality and facility improvements elsewhere in the Borough (See R9)</p> <p>The pitch at Southfields Park could be lost diverting the maintenance costs to the upkeep of pitches offering better provision. Alternatively, the site could provide an opportunity for a community asset transfer providing benefactor club(s) with a lease. This will enable them to improve, manage and run the site more efficiently and provide an opportunity for club development.</p> <p>If quality, affordability and access issues continue on existing pitches, shortfalls will occur in the future. A commitment must be made on the disposal of the school sites to review the PFI arrangements in terms of the pricing structure to improve accessibility to the PFI sports facilities. It will be difficult to justify the release of Parklands, Kingsthorpe and St Mary's if this commitment is not secured.</p>
<b>Football 15</b>	<p>The Council should adopt a policy on asset transfer of sites. The policy should set out the circumstances in which this should be considered and the overall benefit to the community and club.</p>

## Cricket

There are 22 cricket pitches in the Borough, of which 9 are in public ownership and 4 are at school sites. Using these facilities are a total of 19 senior and 14 junior teams.

Overall the Active People 4 survey findings (Sport England 2010) show that in the northern half of the borough up to 1% of the Northampton adult population play cricket whilst in the southern half of the authority up to 2% of the population play. Participation is therefore above the national average.

Market Segmentation (Sport England 2010), reveals that cricket participation is focused in the same market segments as football; primarily young adult males who play team sports on a very regular basis and for competitive reasons. Around 20% of the total cricket played is by groups who participate for more social and recreational reasons. Overall, there is low latent demand for cricket in the Borough

# Summary of Key Issues for Cricket

## KEY ISSUE 1

There are only just enough pitches of the right quality to meet demand for cricket in Northampton. There is likely to be a shortfall in provision once the population grows if participation increases

## KEY ISSUE 2

Pitch quality is inhibited by high levels of use on some wickets. The Northamptonshire Cricket League quality scores demonstrate decline in the quality of some pitches in the Borough from last season, as well as some clubs only just achieving minimum site scores. While much of this is influenced by the lack of pitches, it will have short and long term implications for pitch quality.

The Northamptonshire Cricket League (NCL) in association with the Northamptonshire Cricket Board has set key quality criteria for pitches and ancillary facilities to improve the standard of the game.

A number of the borough owned and school sites do not meet these criteria. As a result there are now pitch shortages in some areas. Those pitches which do meet the criteria are coming under increasing pressure as wickets are used to maximum capacity making it difficult to maintain quality.

The anticipated population growth will lead to a rise in demand by 2026. Projections based on availability of pitches meeting the NCL standards show that by 2026 the pressure on these pitches will be such that quality is likely to be compromised.

## Key Priorities

<b>CRICKET 1</b>	<p>The existing public cricket pitches at the Racecourse, Abington Park and Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground do not fit with the club based structure of cricket in the Borough and have not been used formally for several years.</p> <p>Actively implement the removal of two of the three facilities below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Abington Park</li><li>• Kingsthorpe Recreation Ground and</li><li>• The Racecourse</li></ul> <p>Accommodate additional football pitches to replace these spaces where appropriate. Retain one of the cricket wickets at one of these locations to accommodate the informal and occasional friendly cricket matches that are played.</p>
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<b>CRICKET 2</b>	<p>In partnership with the Northamptonshire Cricket Board, support clubs in obtaining satellite facilities of appropriate quality when demand exceeds supply at the club base.</p> <p>This may include the improvement of existing school facilities to meet club requirements (as well as negotiation of access arrangements) or the creation of new sites.</p> <p>This may be a particular priority for clubs in the centre and south of the Borough.</p>
<b>CRICKET 3</b>	<p>Any new cricket pitches should only be created in partnership with existing clubs and not be developed in isolation. There are opportunities to link with other sports, as well as with the education sector in the provision of cricket facilities.</p>
<b>CRICKET 4</b>	<p>Ensure the new cricket pitch to be provided as part of the British Timkin development is of sufficient quality to meet with Northamptonshire Cricket League criteria and ensure club engagement in development and future management of the site.</p>
<b>CRICKET 5</b>	<p>Where appropriate, work in partnership with the Northamptonshire Cricket Board to support clubs in improving the quality of pitches, and in accessing funding through the ECB Grant Aid and Pitch Advisory Scheme.</p>

## Rugby

There is a strong rugby culture in Northampton. Six clubs support 78 rugby union teams, 30 of which are midi-teams. In addition there are several rugby clubs located just outside the Borough boundaries in South Northamptonshire and Daventry. There is one rugby league club (Northampton RLFC) who plays at the Northampton Casuals Ground during the summer months.

There are a total of 28 rugby pitches in the Borough, 17 of which are based at the club sites.

The Active People 4 Survey (Sport England 2010) indicates that between 0.1% and 1% of adults currently play rugby union, and play is evenly spread across the borough. This is in line with national averages. There is a slightly higher number of people would like to play rugby than currently do. This suggests there is some latent demand for rugby in the Borough.

## Summary of Key Issues

### KEY ISSUE 1

**There are pressures on pitches at existing club bases, population growth and participation increases will generate further demand for rugby**

Currently there are enough rugby pitches to accommodate the needs of community teams at peak times. However, when the need for training is taken into account, school use is added to the equation and those pitches not

available for community use are subtracted from the supply base there is a shortfall in provision.

The club-based nature of rugby means that most clubs are reluctant to use school or satellite facilities as this can inhibit club development. An evaluation of existing club facilities indicates that all club bases are at capacity with some exceeding the level of facilities provided.

An analysis of population growth to 2026, assuming no additional pitch provision, illustrates that there will still be enough pitches when including all community use sites. However, there is likely to be a shortfall in club pitch provision and overuse of existing facilities.

## KEY ISSUE 2

**The pressure on existing pitches means that quality of these sites is of particular importance if pitches are to sustain the required levels of participation**

The quality of pitches is currently good with areas for improvement. However, maintaining the quality will be difficult if demand rises as anticipated; and initiatives such as developing mid-week competitions and matches takes off, as this will reduce time for reinstatement.

## Key Priorities

<b>RUGBY 1</b>	Retain the public rugby pitch at the Racecourse to meet the needs of Northampton Heathens. Provide additional facilities at this site if club development means that additional facilities are required.
<b>RUGBY 2</b>	<p>Northampton High School for Boys, has a strong rugby playing history and is located adjacent to two rugby clubs (Old Northamptonians and Old Scouts)</p> <p>Progress discussions with the RFU in relation to providing a 3g AGP pitch suitable for rugby at the school to accommodate the training needs of nearby clubs and reduce the pressures on existing pitches.</p> <p>The conversion of sand based pitches (under hockey section) will provide further opportunities to increase the supply of suitable pitches, albeit further from the club bases.</p>
<b>RUGBY 3</b>	<p>Support proposals of any existing clubs to relocate / provide extra playing fields at club sites where they fit in with overall club development plans.</p> <p>Engage in negotiations with schools (including PFI sites) to facilitate access to existing sites where this is required as a satellite facility. Potential opportunity sites include Weston Favell School, The Duston School, Thomas Becket, Northampton School for Boys, Malcolm Arnold Academy.</p>
<b>RUGBY 4</b>	Ensure security of tenure at Northampton Old Scouts RFC; this is particularly important in the context of the pressures on existing pitches.

	Where NBC lease facilities to clubs that rent, rent reviews should take into account the club's role in the community and the service they provide, along with the costs associated with this.
<b>RUGBY 5</b>	Improvements to the following club venues are required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northampton BBOB – pitch renovations including drainage and levelling</li> <li>• Northampton Casuals – floodlights and pitch renovations</li> <li>• Northampton Old Scouts – pitch renovations, drainage, levelling and new club house</li> <li>• Old Northamptonians – improved floodlighting</li> </ul>
<b>RUGBY 6</b>	Promote the availability and use of the Northampton Saints and RFU tractor and vertidrainer to rugby clubs to raise awareness and support the overall quality improvements identified in Rugby 5 priority.

## Hockey

Little hockey is played within the borough boundary presently. The Northampton Hockey Club (20+ teams) travel to Moulton to play. The Towcester Ladies Hockey Club (3 teams and 40 juniors) currently use the facilities at Northampton Girls School, however they are looking to relocate back to Towcester. The Northamptonshire Mixed Hockey League also includes teams from the Northampton area, although all matches are located just outside the Northampton BC boundary.

There are four artificial grass pitches in the borough suitable for hockey (sand based); Northampton High School for Girls, Kingsthorpe College, Kings Heath Recreation Ground and Malcolm Arnold Academy. Three of the four are located to the north of the borough with Northampton School for Girls serving the south. Two of the four are poor quality restricting site usage; Kingsthorpe College (refurbishment due in 2 years) and Kings Heath AGP (unmanned site, undulating carpet and broken floodlights).

The Active People 4 survey indicates that between 0.1% and 1% of the population participate in hockey. According to Sport England Market Segmentation, the profile of participants is much more balanced across the participation segments than for any other sport. There is limited latent demand for hockey in the borough.

## Summary of Key Issues

### KEY ISSUE 1

**Outside of curricular time, no hockey is played in the Borough Boundaries. There are four sand based AGPs that are designed for hockey. Two of these are low quality.**

There is limited use of the two high quality facilities but there is merit in retaining them. Whilst they cannot be used for competitive football matches they can be used for training purposes alleviating demand on grass pitches. In addition

there needs to be provision to meet hockey demand should the occasion arise.

### Key Priorities

<p><b>HOCKEY 1</b></p>	<p>Consideration should be given to the scale, surface and function of any new or refurbished artificial grass pitches (AGPs) in partnership with Clubs and National Governing Bodies and utilising Sport England guidance on 'Selecting the Right Artificial Surface (2010).' This approach should also be used when considering refurbishment and re-surfacing as well as new provision.</p> <p>Given the lack of demand for hockey in the Borough, it may be more appropriate to relay a 3g surface at Kingsthorpe College than relay the sand based surface (the carpet is due for replacement in 2 years and the site is located in an area of high demand for football).</p> <p>As a minimum, and subject to curriculum discussions, retain at least one sand based facility in the Borough to ensure there are opportunities for hockey. Malcolm Arnold Academy may be suitable for this. It's close proximity provides an opportunity to develop a partnership with Northampton University. The retention of one facility would also provide the opportunity to capitalise on any unmet / latent demand (through the creation of a local club) which arises as a result of the move back to Towcester for Towcester Ladies and the location of Northampton Hockey Club to the north of the town. Given the location of Northampton High School for Girls in the south of the borough, as an alternative option, it may be appropriate to retain this.</p>
<p><b>HOCKEY 2</b></p>	<p>The Kings Heath AGP has undulating surface and has no floodlights or changing accommodation. Its location on an unmanned site means that it is rarely used and is considered unsafe by clubs. This facility should be relocated to a site where it is better able to meet demand. The existing distribution of facilities, along with population growth, would suggest that this should be to the South or West of the Borough. This could link with Rugby R2, which proposes a new AGP at Northampton High School for Boys.</p>
<p><b>HOCKEY 3</b></p>	<p>Educate providers on the importance of establishing a sinking fund for AGPs to ensure that facilities are maintained to a consistently high standard.</p>

## Monitoring and Review

Monitoring and review should be undertaken as follows:

- Ongoing monitoring of changes to the pitch stock in the Borough both qualitative and quantitative, using the tools provided as part of this assessment
- Annual review of participation, with support from National Governing bodies, to identify any key changes to participation trends in the Borough, and the likely implications of these changes
- Commitment to review progress by NBC, NCC and Northamptonshire Sport on the delivery and identification of additional priorities, drawing on the data collated as part of the above two actions, to ensure the approach remains relevant and current
- The amount of funding for pitches or provision of additional pitches delivered in association with new development will be monitored through the Planning Divisions AMR (Annual Monitoring Report)
- Periodical full refresh of the documentation / strategy (every five years).