

Barking and Dagenham Playing Pitch Strategy - Summary of key findings for football, cricket, rugby union, hockey, and tennis

1.0 FOOTBALL SUMMARY

- 1.1 It is clear that there is significant potential to grow mini and youth football over the coming years but supply of facilities dedicated to mini-football is poor in terms of quantity.
- 1.2 The supply and demand balance figures show a significant oversupply of adult pitches. These pitches should be re-marked as pitches for youth and mini football to meet growing demand in this area.
- 1.3 There are a number of key site issues, driven predominantly by over use, unauthorised use and issues relating to drainage and maintenance regimes. There are also issues at these sites with ancillary accommodation that need to be addressed across the borough but particularly at key sites.
- 1.4 Parsloes Park has been identified as a strategic football hub due to the significant number of pitches and teams that use it as a home ground. There is much reliance on this site to service the needs of adult football teams in the borough. However, issues such as unauthorised use, poor car parking and very poor ancillary facilities must be addressed.
- 1.5 The issues at this site need to be addressed collectively through a partnership approach with key stakeholders outside of football and the wider park as a whole. Car parking has improved on this site but the bays need to be permanently marked out to fit the maximum number of cars in there.
- 1.6 Pitch quality is a problem in the borough with many clubs reporting the condition of pitches to be getting worse not better. Council pitches in particular need to demonstrate improvements to maintenance regimes and marking/seeding, and begin to invest in better drainage systems. League secretaries confirmed the issue with cancellation of matches in recent seasons has been a major issue. However, the Council does make efforts to extend access to pitches beyond the normal end of the season to accommodate cancelled fixtures.
- 1.7 Given the quality issues with Council sites, there is concern over the fees and charges tariff.
- 1.8 The FA would like the Council, through the delivery of this strategy, to place a greater emphasis on protecting the quality of pitch surfaces through for example, low level fences and other measures to protect pitches from dog walkers exercising their dogs, people riding across them on motorbikes and bicycles.
- 1.9 Valence Park has been identified as a site that could hold further pitches, which would be welcome with the expected increase in teams for Valence United FC.
- 1.10 There are two types of artificial turf pitches in the Borough:

- **3G Pitch Artificial Grass** – This surface type is ideal for both football pitches and rugby as it is infilled with a layer of rubber crumb granules which help the pitch to provide natural playing characteristics; however, it is not suitable for hockey. The third generation synthetic carpet is usually installed onto a shockpad which gives support to players' joints and prevents injury while taking part in training or matches.
- **2G Sand Filled / Sand Dressed Synthetic Turf** – This artificial all weather pitch specification has a layer of silica sand infill applied at the base of the synthetic grass fibres. By installing this sand the turf pile is kept upright and gives great playing qualities for football and hockey as it lets the ball to roll evenly across the pitch.

1.11 The analysis indicates that there is a need for further 3G (artificial turf) pitch provision but this may be limited to one or two additional facilities. One 3G is known to be in the planning process at the Academy of Dreams development at Manor Road Sports Ground which should be encouraged and finalised and community use agreements be put in place for the use of the new pitches. The Council would also be keen to see 3G pitch provision at Parsloes Park.

1.12 There are three or four 2G artificial turf pitches that will need resurfacing in the short-term and the tendency may be for site providers to look at replacing 2G with 3G given the low demand from hockey (one club in the Borough) versus football demand.

2.0 CRICKET SUMMARY

2.1 There is a lower level of cricket participation in LBBDD than might be expected from national data such as the Active People survey. This may in part be explained by a comparative under-supply of facilities leading in turn to players having to play outside the borough, such as the Scintilla club. There is no club in LBBDD which plays in the strongest league in Essex, the Shepherd and Neame Essex League which is an ECB Premier League.

2.2 Research suggests that there is the perceived oversupply of cricket wickets in the Borough, which equates to a surplus of circa 50 match equivalents across a season. However, this figure needs to be considered with caution because of the high number of wickets at the Eastbrook May and Baker sports club, which are unlikely to be all playable each season.

2.3 There are only three cricket clubs in the borough, which is low given the propensity of local people to take part in cricket based on demographic trends. However, it is critical to acknowledge the level of informal participation within the area. The England Cricket Board carried out a National Player Survey that captured the demographic profile of its participants. It evidenced that 30% of the cricket playing population is drawn from the South Asian Community. East London Boroughs are heavily represented in this segment.

2.4 The lack of clubs and facilities is particularly striking in view of the high levels of participation amongst the south Asian communities, which make up a good proportion of LBBDD's population. The size of population and ethnicity in Barking and Dagenham indicates that there would be demand for a total of 17 adult teams from the non-Asian community and 19 from the Asian community. At present there are

only 10. There is, therefore, a need to secure additional facilities through the development process to meet this latent demand and that which will arise from population growth.

- 2.5 A key objective of stakeholders over the next 12 months should be to quantify informal demand and then allocate suitable facilities to encourage these groups and teams to develop further.
- 2.6 There are issues with the quality of pitches with no sites rated as good and four as poor. It is important to note that most clubs play on municipal fields and don't have control of the grounds or have specialist groundsmen.
- 2.7 There are also key issues in relation to ancillary facilities and particularly changing rooms. In this respect, St Chad's Park pavilion is a facility in particular need of refurbishment.

3.0 RUGBY UNION SUMMARY

- 3.1 There is an undersupply of rugby pitches in the borough that equates to a deficit of two pitches for adults and 16 pitches for juniors. It is therefore a priority of the RFU that all existing pitches need to be protected, carrying capacity improved where possible at existing pitches and also introduce opportunities for training on 3G pitches to relieve pressure.
- 3.2 There is a significant shortage of junior rugby pitches and critically there is not one rugby site in the borough that can cater for both seniors and junior sections (due to inadequate changing facilities), which means most clubs have to separate training sessions across multi-sites and this can affect a club's appeal and sustainability.
- 3.3 This means in the first instance, action must be taken to secure and protect existing rugby. The changing facilities at Central Park have been identified as poor and in need of refurbishment to support the growing needs of Dagenham RFC. The club also needs more pitches.
- 3.4 The quality of pitches in the borough is problematic with eight pitches given the D0/M0 rating (significant improvements to maintenance and pipe drainage system required) and five given the D1/M0 rating (significant improvements to maintenance and silt drainage system required). Comments received from clubs regarding quality issues include references to poor maintenance and inadequate drainage schemes.

4.0 HOCKEY SUMMARY

- 4.1 There is an oversupply of hockey pitches in the borough which is equivalent to 154 hours per week / four 2G AGPs. This is significant but the results should be used cautiously. If the surface of the pitch at Robert Clack Leisure Centre is not replaced in the short term, then hockey would be compromised and especially now there are two clubs in the borough and trends showing a rise in popularity of the sport locally.
- 4.2 Romford Hockey Club's needs are generally well catered for at Robert Clack Leisure Centre although the surface of the 2G pitch is in need of replacement in the short term and has worsened due to wear and tear. The club has expansion plans and wishes to introduce new teams but believes expansion is limited by the size

and quality of changing rooms at the site. Romford Hockey Club's intended growth may require it to need additional pitches for training. It is also vital that any resurfacing at Robert Clack Leisure is a hockey suitable surface.

- 4.3 The issue with this level of oversupply is that in the short-term, when many of the existing 2G pitches need resurfacing (which is the case for three or four of the pitches) then the debate about whether the surface should be 2G or 3G will be important because hockey cannot be played on a 3G surface.
- 4.4 If there is a lack of demand for hockey but a greater demand for football training spaces then the likelihood is that providers of 2G pitches will wish to convert to 3G. This however could over saturate the market for the provision of 3Gs and undermine the viability of existing ones. Also, there would be a lack of support from funding agencies for resurfacing work where there is already provision in place to meet demand.
- 4.5 There is due to begin a major four-year project centred on the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre to increase exposure and grow participation in east London. With limited pitch provision in Tower Hamlets, Newham and Waltham Forest demand may look for solutions in LBBB. The project could also inspire further growth in participation in LBBB

5.0 TENNIS SUMMARY

- 5.1 There is some evidence to support latent demand for Tennis and potential Club membership and this should be addressed through a Tennis Development Plan.
- 5.2 One key issue flagged up was public awareness and information. For example, only 20% know where their nearest tennis club is located according to research by YouGov and The Tennis Foundation. This suggests that there is a general lack of awareness about current facilities and opportunities to participate in tennis, and there exists a strong perception that participating in tennis is expensive, and likely to cost more than they would be willing to pay. This clearly is an issue of perception and there is an opportunity to address this across a number of fronts if prioritised by the Council.
- 5.3 The results of the site assessments show the courts currently to be in reasonable condition with the exception of Parsloes Park. It is likely that some of the surfaces will need resurfacing in the next three years. Lack of floodlights limit the hours of play significantly, particularly outside of the summer months, and the Council should explore opportunities for floodlighting on existing courts, taking into account the need to illuminate access paths through the park to the courts as well. Damage to nets and fencing will also need to be addressed in the short to medium term.
- 5.4 It is recommended that the Council seeks to identify funding to resurface the following courts and / or replacement of nets and repair / replace fencing:
- Barking Park – 2 courts only
 - Central Park
 - St Chads Park
 - Old Dagenham Park

- Greatfields Park

- 5.5 Despite the good location, redevelopment of Tennis at Parsloes Park cannot be justified at this moment in time, until a Tennis Development Plan is implemented. It is recommended that re-provision is reviewed in 2016/7.
- 5.6 The previous Tennis Development Plan highlighted the potential issues of lack of access to affordable tennis racquets and balls. A simple hire scheme running out of facilities at Barking Park and other Park Sites such as Central Park (which is in place through the Pitch and Putt Operator) could address some elements of this issue. This could link to a Tennis Equipment donation scheme which could redistribute equipment to potential users. It is acknowledged that this requires resourcing.