

## OPEN SPACE, SPORT AND LEISURE STUDY

Planning Advisory Committee - 19 April 2017

Report of Chief Planning Officer

Status: For consideration

Key Decision: No

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### Executive Summary:

The Open Space, Sport and Leisure Study is an evidence base document in support of the emerging Local Plan. The purpose of the study is to assess the existing open space, sport and leisure provision within the district and to identify future issues and needs up to 2035. The study also includes a playing pitch strategy.

**The findings of the study will help inform the development of local plan policy options for open spaces, sports provision and leisure. It will also inform the development of the Council's corporate policies and strategy options for open spaces and leisure across the District.**

The study is made up of three parts:

- Open spaces
- Playing Pitch Strategy
- Indoor Sports Facility Report

The study made a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the District's **open spaces**. It was found that the District is generally well served by spaces of public value but that improvements could be made to all aspects of open space including allotments, amenity greenspace, natural and semi-natural greenspace and children's and young people facilities.

The **Playing Pitch Strategy** is required to be signed off by the National Governing Bodies and Sport England before the findings can be finalised. Initial findings indicate that the District is generally well served by outdoor sports facilities but that the quality of these facilities could be improved.

A report on the District's **indoor sports facilities** has also been prepared. It identified a need for additional fitness stations across the district. It also notes that much of the District's provision is at education facilities without formal community use agreements and encourages new walking and cycling linkages to increase accessibility.

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**It is for the Local Plan and other Council documents, including the Leisure Strategy, to identify options to address the issues raised in the Open Space, Sport and Leisure Study.**

Officers within the Strategic Planning and Communities and Business Teams will continue to work together to identify opportunities to make improvements across the District and to help meet existing and future needs. This will be in co-operation with the three Portfolio Holders for Planning, Health and Communities.

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**Portfolio Holder**      Cllr. Robert Piper

**Contact Officer**      Helen French, Senior Planning Officer, Ext.7357

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**Recommendation to Planning Advisory Committee:**

To consider the initial findings of the Open Space, Sport and Leisure Study as part of the robust evidence base from which the Local Plan strategy will be developed.

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**Reason for recommendation:** In order to plan for the needs of the District for Open Space, Sport and Leisure provision and to prepare a Local Plan that is based on sound and robust evidence.

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**Introduction and Background**

- 1      The Open Space, Sport and Leisure Study is an evidence base document in support of the emerging Local Plan. The purpose of the study is to assess the existing open space, sport and leisure provision within the district and to identify future issues and needs up to 2035. The study also includes a playing pitch strategy.
- 2      The findings of the study will help inform the development of local plan policy options for open spaces, sports provision and leisure. It will also inform the development of the Council's corporate policies and strategy options.
- 3      The study was a joint undertaking between the Strategic Planning Team and Communities and Business Team. Strategic Leisure in association with 4global and globaltolocal were appointed to undertake the study.
- 4      The study is separated into three sections:
  - Open Space Assessment
  - A Playing Pitch Strategy
  - An Indoor Sports Facility Report

- 5 **Open spaces** within the district which contribute to local communities have been surveyed in terms of quantity and quality. The open spaces which form part of the study include:
- Parks and Gardens - including urban parks, country parks and formal gardens;
  - Amenity Greenspace (most commonly, but not exclusively in housing areas) - including informal recreation spaces, greenspaces in and around housing, domestic gardens and village greens;
  - Natural and Semi-Natural Green Space - including woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands (e.g downlands, commons and meadows) wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and derelict open land and rock areas (e.g. cliffs, quarries and pits);
  - Outdoor Sports Facilities (with natural or artificial surfaces and either publicly or privately owned) - including tennis courts, bowling greens, sports pitches, golf courses, athletics tracks, school and other institutional playing fields, and other outdoor sports areas;
  - Provision for children and young people - including play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops, and other more informal areas (eg 'hanging out' areas, teenage shelters);
  - Allotments and Community Gardens;
  - Green Corridors - including river and canal banks, cycleways and rights of way (including footpaths, bridleways and byways);
  - Cemeteries and Churchyards;
  - Accessible countryside in urban fringe areas;
  - Civic spaces, including civic and market squares, and other hard surfaced areas designed for pedestrians.
- 6 The study identifies local needs and recommends standards of provision for all types of green space, sporting and recreational facilities in accordance with National policy for delivery up to 2035.
- 7 The **Playing Pitch Strategy** is an assessment of the playing pitches, both natural and artificial, within the District. The strategy is produced in line with specific guidance from Sport England which includes surveying existing pitches both in terms of quantity and quality and identifying existing and future provision. The strategy is prepared with the input of the local sports clubs and associations as well as local communities.
- 8 The **Indoor Sports Facility Report** assesses the indoor sports provision across the District. This includes formal provision such as sports centres and schools as well as informal provision such as in village and church halls.

Stakeholders and local communities were invited to comment on existing and future provision.

### **Stakeholder Consultation**

- 9 A comprehensive public consultation exercise has been carried out with local communities to establish attitudes towards existing provision, expectations of provision and patterns of usage.
- 10 A workshop was carried out at the Council Offices for all Town and Parish Councils on all aspects of the Study. This workshop allowed the consultants to speak directly with the Town and Parish Councils in their role as facilitator of many existing facilities as well as the representatives of their local areas. The workshop was also an important opportunity for town and parish councils to input directly into the study. The workshop was attended by 14 out of 31 Town and Parish Councils.
- 11 Parish and Town Councils were also sent an online survey and 10 responses were received.
- 12 For the playing pitch strategy the main Sporting National Governing Bodies and Sport England are instrumental in preparing the study.
- 13 The indoor Sports Facility Report included feedback from Parish and Town Councils, Members, Neighbouring Authorities as well as operators of leisure facilities, educational establishments, National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and other stakeholders.
- 14 For the Open Spaces section the Parish and Town Councils were sent a list of the existing open spaces within their areas to confirm the details were correct and to have the opportunity to identify any sites which had not been included.

### **Study Findings**

#### Open Space Assessment

- 15 An appraisal of all the currently identified open spaces was carried out to determine the quality of existing sites as well as the quantity and accessibility of the sites. This included a desktop analysis as well as a site visit.
- 16 Audits were carried out on all existing sites which had been previously identified in the 2009 study. For quality the following measures were used:
  - Cleanliness and maintenance
  - Security and safety
  - Ancillary facilities (toilets, footpaths, etc.)
  - Transport access
  - Wider benefits (social inclusion, health, economic etc.)

- Specific issues affecting potential for development
  - Welcome
  - CC adaptation
  - General site access, including less able bodied
  - Information and signage
  - Overall potential for improvement
- 17 Each site was given a rating from very poor to very good for quality.
- 18 All **Parks and Gardens** in this category are rated as “good” or “very good” and it was noted that the District has a higher than average number of nationally significant sites. Most parks are well-designed to provide a range of different uses, and are very well used. However, the Parks and Gardens within the district are not all publically accessible (i.e. without an entrance fee or restricted hours) and many are privately run including Hever Castle. There are also a limited number of smaller sites serving a more local community and some smaller sites could be more welcoming.
- 19 For **Amenity greenspace** it was found that most sites scored “average” or “good”. Where sites scored “poor” the standards vary according to the maintenance of the site and as a result of inappropriate use. There was generally an absence of welcoming signage or information. The majority of areas are poorly landscaped and could be improved through “softening” areas of lawn by using floral meadow or tree planting. There are opportunities for improvements to make the sites more user friendly and accessible to all.
- 20 The Council’s **Civic Spaces** are of a generally high standard with no immediate concerns or issues.
- 21 The District has a very low number of **Children’s and Young People Facilities** compared to other parts of the country and many parts of the District are below the accessibility standard. The existing sites were found to score average or above with three sites scoring “poor”. Most sites are poorly signposted and the signage tends towards prohibitive uses. The landscaping is often limited providing little shading to protect children or guardians from the sun. A significant percentage of sites have no access paths and usually involve a long walk across grass. There are some excellent examples of innovative play equipment but other play spaces show little or no signs of recent maintenance. There are opportunities for improvements to be made to existing sites and also for additional sites to meet the needs of the District’s current and future residents.
- 22 The study provides analysis on the land around **Outdoor Sports Facilities** which provide wider social benefits. Access to these sites was poor in some cases with few examples of landscaping to provide interest, shade and biodiversity. There was also found to be a lack of seating or litter bins.
- 23 The District has an unusually large number of **Natural and Semi Natural** spaces (including **Green Corridors**) the majority of which are rated

“average” with only 20% in “good” condition. Many sites are well-maintained, clean and accessible and significant number have interesting signage and welcoming entrances. However, some isolated sites appear to be neglected and have significant issues relating to littering and flytipping. There is an opportunity to develop projects which improve the natural and semi natural spaces across the district and also to seek accessibility and biodiversity improvements.

- 24 **Allotments** across the District are generally score average or good but improvements to the sites could be made. Some sites can be difficult to find, have poor security and some lack external maintenance outside of plots. The study recommends investigating further how the District’s allotment provision can be improved.
- 25 The **Cemeteries and Churchyards** across the District all score either “good” or “average”. Most sites have ample or adequate seating and some have had innovative efforts made to cultivate habitat and biodiversity enhancement.
- 26 It was found that the **Accessible Areas of Countryside on the Urban Fringe** are of generally poor in standard and accessibility and that they are often unwelcoming. There is an opportunity to improve these areas and make them more user friendly and accessible to the District’s residents.
- 27 The study makes a number of recommendations which can be considered in the emerging Local Plan and Council documents. The recommendations include:
- Protection of the countryside
  - Enhancement of biodiversity
  - Seeking opportunities to meet areas of deficiency in quantity and accessibility
  - Improve the quality of all types of open space including allotments and children’s and young people playspace.

#### Playing Pitch Strategy

- 28 The Playing Pitch Strategy gives an overall assessment of the standard of playing pitches across the District.
- 29 It takes account of the sporting pitches and facilities to support the playing of Hockey, Rugby, Cricket and Football within the District.
- 30 The findings of the strategy need to be agreed with the sporting National Governing Bodies as well as Sport England. The strategy is still subject to this agreement and is expected to be finalised before the Issues and Options consultation so that the findings can be taken into account.
- 31 The initial findings of the playing pitch strategy indicate that:

- All cricket pitches are rated good or standard, except one which rates as poor
- All rugby pitches are rated as poor, except 5 which are adequate
- There are seven hockey pitches, two are rated as poor, four standard, and one as good.
- The majority of football pitches in the District are of standard quality.

32 Based on the analysis to date, the District has sufficient pitches for cricket, hockey and rugby up to 2035 but has a need for additional youth football pitches.

### Indoor Sports Facility Report

33 The Indoor Sports Facility Report reviewed a range of existing indoor facilities including:

- Sports Halls (both sports and activity)
- Swimming Pools
- Health and fitness suites and studios
- Squash Courts
- Indoor Tennis
- Indoor Bowls
- Gymnastics and Trampolining

34 Overall the District has a good level of indoor sports provision Table 1 outlines the main findings of the report by facility.

Table 1: Main issues and findings of the District’s indoor sports facility provision.

Facility	Main issues and findings
Sports Halls (both sports and activity)	<p>12/25 halls are strategic in size (3+ courts)</p> <p>Majority of residents have access to “pay and play” facilities within a 20minutes drivetime.</p> <p>A number of village/community halls are used for leisure</p> <p>Although there is an oversupply of Sports Halls across the district many halls have no formal Community Use Agreement (CUA) and therefore use could be withdrawn at</p>

	<p>any time.</p> <p>The study recommends that the Council try and increase the number of formal CUAs to ensure the retention of sports halls to the end of the plan period.</p>
Swimming Pools	<p>18 swimming pools over 13 sites across District.</p> <p>14 pools are of a strategic size (6 lanes x20m).</p> <p>Pools are available at 4 sites for community daytime use.</p> <p>Facilities at White Oak (Swanley) and Edenbridge Leisure Centre will need to be replaced in the Short and Medium term.</p> <p>Although there is an oversupply of water space in the District the majority of pools are not available for public daytime use and many facilities are in need of refurbishment</p> <p>The study recommends that the Council try and increase the number of formal CUAs to ensure the retention of water-space at these facilities to the end of the plan period.</p>
Health and fitness suites and studios	<p>13 existing health and fitness sites and 11 studios in Sevenoaks District.</p> <p>3 fitness suites and studios are for private use only.</p> <p>Commercial provision is provided by small independent centres rather than large chains.</p> <p>The Majority of residents are within 20minute drive time of a community accessible fitness suite/studio with the exception of the North of the District.</p> <p>There is currently an under supply of -157 (rising to -219 by 2035) fitness stations and unmet demand for studio provision.</p>
Squash Courts	<p>There is no identified need for additional squash courts across the District.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to the refurbishment of existing facilities.</p>
Indoor Bowls	<p>The two existing indoor bowling facilities are in very good</p>

	<p>condition.</p> <p>There is currently sufficient provision to meet demand however the increase in population especially in the older generation may result in additional future demand for indoor bowling.</p>
Indoor Tennis	<p>There is one indoor tennis facility in the District at the Sennocke Centre.</p> <p>Local clubs and the Tennis NGB have not identified a need for additional facilities.</p>
Gymnastics and Trampolining	<p>There are currently no purpose-built gymnastics and trampolining facilities in the District. Sport takes place in the existing sports halls.</p> <p>Clubs may require additional facilities to meet future demand</p>

35 The report makes a number of recommendations to improve the indoor sports facilities within the District and to meet the needs of the residents up to 2035. **However it will be up to the Local Plan and other Council documents to determine the potential options and strategies to address the issues identified in the study.**

36 The recommendations include:

- Redevelopment of White Oak Leisure Centre
- Work with education partners to increase balance of “pay and play” community access facilities for sports halls and swimming pools and to make better use of existing facilities.
- Address undersupply of fitness stations across the District
- Retain supply of existing squash, indoor bowls and gymnastics facilities whilst encouraging increased participation
- Improve infrastructure to develop safe walking and cycling routes to existing facilities and where possible open up other informal, multipurpose spaces where people can be active.
- Investigate sources of funding to improve community sports facilities in partnership with Public Health bodies and other local partners.

## What happens next?

- 37 The findings of the Open Space, Sport and Leisure Strategy will be used to formulate policy options within the emerging Local Plan and other Council strategies and documents. Potential planning policy options will be considered in the Local Plan issues and options and be subject to public consultation.
- 38 A Leisure Strategy will be prepared for the Council's corporate aims and opportunities.
- 39 Officers within the Strategic Planning and Communities and Business Teams will continue to work together to identify opportunities to make improvements across the District and to help meet existing and future needs. This will be in co-operation with the three Portfolio Holders for Planning, Health and Communities.

## Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

The Committee could choose not to endorse the Open Space, Sport and Leisure Study, however this is not recommended. The previous Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study which informed the Core Strategy and Allocations and Development Management Plan is now considerably out of date. To rely on this out of date evidence would lead to the Local Plan being found unsound at examination.

## Key Implications

### Financial

The Open Space, Sport and Leisure Study is funded through the LDF budget and in partnership with the Communities and Business Team.

### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

Preparation of a Local Plan is a statutory requirement. There are defined legal requirements that must be met in plan making which are considered when the plan is examined by a Government Planning Inspector. Risks associated with Local Plan making are set out in the Local Development Scheme.

### Equality Assessment

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impacts will be analysed via an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) to be prepared alongside each key stage of plan making.

## Conclusions

