

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

<b>TO:</b>	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
<b>DATE:</b>	10 NOVEMBER 2021		
<b>TITLE:</b>	PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY 2036		
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<b>SERVICE:</b>	CULTURE	<b>WARDS:</b>	BOROUGHWIDE
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To present an assessment of the current provision of sports pitches within the Borough and identify what the anticipated future demand in terms of quality and quantity of pitches will be by 2036 to meet demand using Football Association methodology. The report identifies a long-term level of provision for the Council to work towards.
- 1.2 Variation in demand will be experienced through the 15-year period with changing age and gender mixes playing requiring a different mix and number of pitch sizes. Through regular review and amendment of the provision of pitches demand will be accommodated, moving towards the long term identified provision.
- 1.3 It should be noted that the proposals in this strategy do not commit the Council or its partners to the funding, provision or management of sites. The recommended actions will be used as a guide for investment, including via the Community Infrastructure Levy, other developers' contributions, and national governing body of sport funding.
- 1.4 The level of provision and proposed action plan are identified in the following appendices:
  - Appendix 1 - Pitch provision 2020/21
  - Appendix 2 - Recommended Site Action Plans 2019-2036

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 The Council will endeavour to provide sufficient sports pitches, subject to available funding, to accommodate the predicted demand up to 2036 for Football, Cricket, Rugby, Hockey, Lacrosse, Gaelic Football and Australian Rules Football as identified in Table 8 at 6.1 and Table 9 at 6.2
- 2.2 The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) laid out within this report is adopted, including the updated site action plan in Appendix 2. This is based upon research undertaken by sports provision consultants 4Global in 2019.
- 2.3 The action plan in Appendix 2 be reviewed every three years, including consultation with pitch users, to reflect changing demands through to 2036.

### **3. POLICY CONTEXT**

- 3.1** The current playing pitch strategy has expired and Sport England recommend having a current strategy in place to support planning policy and support funding applications. This report summarises the current provision, anticipated future demand and proposes recommended actions for a range of grass pitch based sports. Appendix 2 sets out in more detail the recommended actions at locations across the borough to meet the anticipated demand by 2036.
- 3.2** There are currently 79 football pitches (from 7 to 11 aside), six rugby pitches, six hockey pitches, one Gaelic football pitch, one Australian rules pitch and 56 cricket wickets (strips) in Reading. Grass pitches are able to sustain a different number of games per week or season depending on age of players, ground conditions and maintenance. In Reading some pitches are overused and some are underused. The current provision significantly over provides adult football pitches for both current and future demand and far too few junior pitches to meet future demand, unless changes are made. This strategy and accompanying action plan sets out a direction of travel that will improve the quality of pitches and vary some pitch sizes to accommodate a wider range of players, which will enable the borough to meet anticipated demand by 2036.
- 3.2** The recommended actions in Appendix 2 have been prioritised using Sport England methodology, in line with national governing bodies of sport priorities. Some of the recommended actions can be funded through existing maintenance budgets, or through CIL and S106 as and when they become available. However, the significant recommended improvements, for example new artificial turf pitches, will be subject to securing external funding, which may also require match funding. As part of the recommended actions, the Council is keen to explore partnerships and community use agreements to maintain or increase access to facilities for the whole community. The recommended actions in this strategy do not commit the Council or its partners to the funding, provision or management of sites. They will be used as a guide for investment, including via the Community Infrastructure Levy, other developers' contributions, and national governing body of sport funding.
- 3.3** The Council will continue to engage with principal partners, leagues and clubs (those with and without lease agreements) to plan provision for the following season that best meets need. An annual delivery plan will be produced as part of the service planning process.

### **4. SCOPE OF REVIEW**

- 4.1** This playing pitch strategy is one of three pieces of work currently being undertaken to address sport and leisure provision in the borough. Informal recreational play activity, including skateparks, multi-use-games-areas and Children's playgrounds, are being reviewed as part of a review of outdoor play.
- 4.2** Reading's indoor leisure and recreation provision is being met and enhanced by £40 million investment into new leisure facilities within the Borough. This includes a new-build modern leisure centre and two new swimming pools. The new-build leisure centre at Rivermead will offer a 25m competition pool, combined teaching and diving pool, splash pad, 6-court sports hall, 120 station gym, 3 studios and a café and soft play. In addition to the refurbishment of Palmer Park Sports Stadium there will be a new 25m pool, 100 station gym, 3 studios and a café, soft play and party rooms. Both Meadway and South Reading Leisure Centre will also benefit from improvements. Tennis courts are not part of this strategy, however, if in the future funding becomes available for strategic planning then this will be explored.

### 4.3 Playing Pitch Strategy

4.3.1 The Play Pitch Strategy (PPS) considers existing sports pitches, the anticipated future need for sports pitches, and opportunities for new provision. The initial PPS should be reviewed every three years. Future demand is considered to 2036 in line with the new local plan. The sports facilities assessed are:

- Football
- Cricket
- Rugby Union
- Hockey
- Artificial pitches
- Provision for Gaelic Football, Australian Rules Football and Lacrosse.

4.3.2 The level of provision of pitches was reviewed with consideration given to:

- Sport England methodologies for calculating the demand for pitches
- Fields in Trust Standards for Playing Field provision
- Demand for pitches within Reading
- Known likely changes in demand

### 4.4 Supply, Quality and Capacity of Existing Pitch Provision

4.4.1 Within the Borough there is wide distribution of pitches and there is sufficient supply of sports field capable of supporting formal team sports. However, some changes are required to provide the opportunity for everyone to play on appropriately sized and quality pitches. Changing pitch sizes and improving pitch quality will support increased use, similarly the development of five Artificial Turf Pitches (ATPs) will significantly improve the availability of sports pitches.

4.4.2 The 2020 supply of pitches is illustrated in Table 1 below. This is updated from the 2019 PPS and includes grass and artificial turf pitches as well as sites not currently in use.

Sport	Number of Pitches
Football Adult 11 v 11	32
Football Youth 11 v 11	20
Football Junior 9 v 9	26
Football Mini 7 v 7	12
Football Mini 5 v 5	4
Training and Recreational Use (small sided court, non-FA reg)	10
Hockey	6
Cricket Wickets	56
Rugby	6
Gaelic Football	1
Australian Rules Football	1
Lacrosse	1

4.4.3 In assessing the quality of grass football pitches the Football Association's (FA) methodology and standards have been followed. Factors such as the soil type and fertility of soil, along with how well an area drains, affects the "carrying capacity" of a pitch. The carrying capacity of a pitch identifies the number of games a pitch can accommodate without adverse deterioration of the playing surface. The carrying capacity will vary according to pitch quality and the age group using a pitch; younger groups are lighter and play shorter games. The FA group the ability of pitches to

accommodate a varying number of games per week into good quality, standard quality and poor quality in descending order of carrying capacity. A poor-quality pitch surface will deteriorate more quickly with heavy use or in poor weather than a standard or good quality one. This measure therefore reflects the ability of a pitch to accommodate high use not just how elements such as slope, quality of maintenance, or ability to provide a playing surface when used less often.

4.4.4 The carrying capacity (number of games that can be played) of an ATP is determined by the hours available for use during peak time rather than wear and tear. ATP's tend to be used for both matches and club training throughout the week and evenings.

4.4.5 Grass pitches within the Borough are most frequently used at weekends, with adult games typically taking place on Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning and youth games typically taking place on Saturday morning. Informal training on grass pitches will reduce the carrying capacity of pitches for formal games.

#### 4.5 Current and Future Demand

This sporting season has been severely disrupted by Covid-19, therefore the future demand for provision has been calculated based on the previous season. However, future demand is difficult to predict as there is uncertainty around the rate of recovery from Covid-19. The demand for pitch provision will be reviewed every three years to ensure the appropriate adjustments are made.

### 5. THE PROPOSAL

5.1 The provision of sports pitches has been broken down into sport and pitch surface type.

#### 5.2 FOOTBALL

5.2.1 Football is predominantly played on grass pitches within Reading. Grass pitches, despite their requirement for ongoing maintenance, are essential for accommodating the number of teams / groups wanting to play Football within the Borough. This section of the review looks at grass pitches only as Artificial Turf Pitches (ATPs) are reviewed later.

5.2.2 Pitch size is usually reflective of the age group playing. The FA guidelines for the appropriate pitch size for the age of players can be seen below. However, within Reading there is a need for teams and pitches to be flexible as we move towards the 2036 provision targets.

The FA Recommended Pitch Sizes							
Age grouping	Type	Recommended size <b>without</b> runoff (safety area around pitch)		Recommended size <b>including</b> runoff (safety area around pitch)		Recommended size of goal posts	
		Length x width (yards)		Length x width (yards)		Height x width (ft)	
Mini-Soccer U7/U8	5 v 5	40	30	46	36	6	12
Mini-Soccer U9/U10	7 v 7	60	40	66	46	6	12
Youth U11/U12	9 v 9	80	50	86	56	7	16
Youth U13/U14	11 v 11	90	55	96	61	7	21*
Youth U15/U16	11 v 11	100	60	106	66	8	24
Youth U17/U18	11 v 11	110	70	116	76	8	24
Over 18 (senior ages)	11 v 11	110	70	116	76	8	24

#### 5.2.3 Current Provision

Within Reading there are currently:

- 30 Adult 11 v 11 grass pitches
- 18 Youth 11 v 11 grass pitches
- 25 Junior 9 v 9 grass pitches
- 11 Mini 7 v 7 grass pitches
- 1 Mini 5 v 5 grass pitch

The Fields in Trust Standard of 1.21 hectare of sports pitch per 1,000 population is not met within the Borough. However, through improving the quality of grass pitches and providing ATPs the capacity of the pitches provided can be increased to meet anticipated future demand. Given the increasing demand for open space and the response to Climate Change (The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25), for example the increased planting of trees to increase canopy cover to 25% by 2030 (RBC Tree Strategy, 2021), it is not possible to increase the total area of grass pitches and to increase canopy cover. Furthermore, increasing the total area of grass pitches to meet the Fields in Trust standard will accommodate more pitches than required. This Standard was adopted prior to the common use of ATPs which are much more efficient in terms of utilisation of space.

Analysis of supply and demand of grass pitches shows that for adult 11 v 11 and mini 5 v 5 current supply meets current demand. Since 2019 there have been changes made to the balance of adult through to mini soccer pitches and current demand is being met, although some junior teams are choosing to use adult pitches. Ongoing changes to provision are required to continue to accommodate the predicted changing demand.

#### 5.2.4 Future Supply and Demand

5.2.5 The carrying capacity of football pitches can be seen in the Table 3 below. Within the Borough all pitches are of standard quality, except for Mapledurham and Victoria Recreation Ground. The following pitches at Mapledurham are of good quality and ready for use: one adult 11 v 11, two youth 11 v 11, one junior 9 v 9 and one mini 7 v 7. At Victoria Recreation Ground the junior 9 v 9 pitch is currently of poor quality.

#### 5.2.6

Table 2 - Carrying Capacity of Football Pitches (Match Equivalent Sessions)			
	Poor Quality	Standard Quality	Good Quality
Adult 11 v 11	1	2	3
Youth 11 v 11	1	2	4
Junior 9 v 9	1	2	4
Mini 7 v 7	2	4	6
Mini 5 v 5	2	4	6

In addition to the quality of pitch, the length of a game will impact upon the ability of a pitch to accommodate games at peak times. For example, Sunday afternoon league matches last about two hours. It is difficult to accommodate two games before daylight curtails games. Junior matches tend to be shorter and with morning kick off times allow games to be played consecutively. This will mean peak time capacity of an adult pitch will be shown as one game and junior as two or more.

Table 3 below shows the predicted supply and demand for grass football pitches in 2036. As mentioned at 4.5 this is based on the assessment of the last full season due to Covid-19 severely disrupting this season.

The table below is illustrative and shows how the required level of pitch provision / supply may be delivered in 2036 (subject to accessing the necessary funding). This will be periodically reviewed with some changes expected to be made to reflect changes in club structure and the distribution of pitches. The predicted supply of adult football pitches is identified to meet peak demand with all league games being

played concurrently at peak times. This provides some excess capacity but will allow for variation in the configuration of sites to meet changing age groups participating in football at different clubs. It is important to have this flexibility to ensure clubs can meet community need.

\* The provision of ATPs across the Borough will accommodate 12 games at peak time. Either one good quality or two standard quality 9 v 9 grass pitches will be required to fulfil anticipated demand.

\*\* Mini 7 v 7 2036 demand will be met by ATPs being developed across the Borough and providing for 18 games at peak times.

Table 3 - Potential Grass Pitch Provision 2036

Site	Adult 11 v 11			Youth 11 v 11		
	2020 Pitches	Pitches 2036	Peak time capacity 2036	2020 Pitches	Pitches 2036	Peak time capacity 2036
<b>RBC Managed</b>						
Christchurch Meadows				2	2	4
Cintra Park	2	2	2			
Clayfield Copse	2	2	2	2	2	4
Coley Recreation	2				2	4
Emmer Green	1	1	1			
Mapledurham	1	2	2	4	3	6
Palmer Park	5	3	3		1	2
Prospect Park	5	3	3		1	2
Rabsons Recreation	4	2	2		1	2
Whitley Wood	2	1	1		1	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Non-RBC Managed</b>						
University of Reading	1	1		1	1	
Caversham Park	1	1	1			
Highdown School					1	2
Prospect School				1	1	2
Reading School		1		3	3	6
Reading Girls School				3	3	6
Blessed Hugh				1	1	2
Ibis	3	1	1	1	2	4
Scours Lane	1	1	1			
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>ATP</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>50</b>

Table 3 - Potential Grass Pitch Provision 2036

Site	Junior 9 v 9			Mini 7 v 7			Mini 5 v 5		
	2020 Pitches	Pitches 2036	Peak time capacity 2036	2020 Pitches	Pitches 2036	Peak time capacity 2036	2020 Pitches	Pitches 2036	Peak time capacity 2036
<b>RBC Managed</b>									
Christchurch Meadows		2	4						
Kings Meadows	6	6	12						
Kensington Road		3	6	4		**			
Mapledurham	1	1	4	2	2	8			
Prospect Park	4	2	4		1	4	1		
Rabsons Recreation	1	2	4						
Victoria Rec	3	3	6						
Whitley Wood	1	1	2						
Crescent Road	5	2	4*	1	1	4			
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Non-RBC Managed</b>									
Highdown	1								
Prospect School	1								
Blessed Hugh	1								
Ibis	1			4					
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>ATP</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>18</b>			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>



### 5.2.7 Ancillary Provision

Ancillary provision includes changing, toilet and social space. In Reading pavilions predominantly provide changing, toilets and showers for teams. Junior and youth football teams now tend to not use changing facilities. Whilst Covid-19 has prevented adult teams using ancillary accommodation teams are now starting to use them again. The Council are increasingly leasing ancillary provision to clubs. The Council recognises the value of clubs managing their own facilities to deliver more than just sporting benefits, for example providing a social community hub. Going forwards, the Council will work with clubs to provide long-term leases for long-term planning.

### 5.2.8 Action Plan

- Table 3 at 5.2.6 summarises what changes need to be made to increase and improve grass football pitch provision managed by RBC. This is identified in more detail in Appendix 2.
- The Council will continue to work with Clubs to enable access to social / ancillary facilities
- As some age groups currently play football on the incorrect sized pitch, the Council will work towards having the right number of correct sized pitches to meet demand.

## 5.3 CRICKET

5.3.1 Cricket is traditionally played on grass pitches. There are also non-turf cricket pitches which require lower maintenance and provide a consistent flat surface. This review looks at both grass and non-turf cricket pitches.

### 5.3.2 Current Provision

Table 4 below illustrates the current cricket pitch provision in the Borough. However, there are currently only three RBC managed sites in the Borough which offer community use (in italics). In addition, Cintra Park is available to be brought back into use.

Table 4 - 2020 Cricket Pitch Provision		
Location	Pitch Type	Match per season capacity (standard quality)
<i>Coley Recreation Ground</i>	1 non-turf	
<i>Kensington Park</i>	1 non-turf	
<i>Palmer Park</i>	1 non-turf	
Cintra Park* <sup>2</sup>	6 grass	24 <sup>#</sup>
BBC Caversham* <sup>1</sup> * <sup>2</sup>	6 grass	24
Ibis Club* <sup>1</sup>	8 grass 1 non-turf	32 <sup>#</sup>
University of Reading* <sup>1</sup> * <sup>2</sup>	10 grass 1 non-turf	40 <sup>#</sup>
Leighton Park School* <sup>1</sup>	10 grass	40
Reading School* <sup>1</sup>	11 grass	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>51 grass</b> <b>5 non-turf</b>	<b>204</b> <b>#Available for Community hire: 112</b>

\*<sup>1</sup> Non-RBC managed and based on PPS 2019 data

\*<sup>2</sup> Not used due to covid / site management

Since the playing pitch provision was assessed, the BBC Caversham Cricket site has closed, and the University of Reading stopped bookings in late 2019. Leighton Park School boasts 10 Cricket Wickets but has a private agreement with Wokingham Cricket Club and is therefore not available for use by other clubs.

The current provision of pitches may be constraining demand. The Council would like to increase the number of cricket pitches for community use and will work with interested parties to allow them to access these facilities.

### 5.3.3 Quality of Pitches

Within the Borough there is wider considerations regarding ongoing maintenance of artificial cricket pitches, for example Kensington Park, as these have been attracting anti-social behaviour and misuse. Kensington Park cricket pitch is not currently in use. Coley Recreation Ground non-turf pitch is poor quality and needs replacing. Cintra Park suffers from unofficial use and consequent damage. Palmer Park's non-turf pitch is of good quality.

### 5.3.4 Future Supply and Demand

To meet future demand there is a requirement for additional cricket pitch facilities and investment in upgrading and maintaining existing facilities. This will be achieved through accessing funding directly or with partner organisations.

### 5.3.5 Action Plan

- Bring Cintra Park cricket wickets back into use.
- If vandalism continues to Kensington Road artificial wicket, funding will be sought to replace this at nearby Prospect Park
- Work with Berkshire Cricket to identify future opportunities to increase and enhance facilities
- Work with Berkshire Cricket to bring disused wickets back into use, protect provisions and replace BBC Caversham wickets
- Work with England Cricket Board (ECB) to identify other potential sites that may be brought into use if demand increased.

## 5.4 RUGBY

5.4.1 Rugby Union is played on grass pitches all levels, with most age groups using the same sized pitches.

### 5.4.2 Current Provision

There are currently four sites within the Borough with a total of six grass pitches. Only the University of Reading offers community use.

Table 5 - 2020 Rugby Pitch Provision				
Location	University of Reading*	Prospect School*	Blessed Hugh Faringdon School*	Leighton Park School*
Number of pitches	3	1	1	1

\*Non-RBC managed and based on PPS 2019 data

5.4.3 There are currently three Reading clubs playing just outside of Reading, all of whom have stated their preferred home ground is in Wokingham where they currently use. This highlights the need to work with neighbouring boroughs to ensure rugby pitches are protected within their local plans.

5.4.4 The clubs playing within Reading (University of Reading and Reading Renegades) use University of Reading or Reading Rugby Club pitches. The Renegades are unable to access a pitch within Reading.

### 5.4.5 Future Supply & Demand

Future match play demand can be met from current supply at University of Reading Sports Park. However, the Rugby Football Union have identified a gap in rugby pitch provision to the West of Reading.

#### 5.4.6 Action Plan

- To protect existing provision
- Identify a site to the West of Reading which will be able to accommodate Rugby
- RBC will work with the Rugby Football Union (RFU) and existing clubs to establish training and playing facilities within Reading as this becomes required.

### 5.5 HOCKEY

#### 5.5.1 Current Provision

Hockey is played on artificial turf pitches (ATPs). In Reading there are currently six hockey ATPs. Current demand is met by current supply. There is currently only one RBC managed ATP in the Borough, at Rivermead Leisure Centre, which offers community use. This is not currently used for hockey as demand is met elsewhere, football is the only sport accommodated on this pitch.

Location	University of Reading*	Highdown School*	Leighton Park School*	Ranikhet Primary School*	The Abbey School*	Rivermead Leisure Centre
Pitch Type / Number	1	1	1	1	1	1

\*Non-RBC managed and based on PPS 2019 data

#### 5.5.2 Quality of Pitches

Three pitches are identified as being good quality; University of Reading, The Abbey and Rivermead Leisure Centre. The remaining three are deemed standard quality.

#### 5.5.3 Future Supply and Demand

There is no predicted growth in demand. However, to ensure future demand is met it is important that hockey pitch provision is protected at University of Reading Sports Park. Sinking funds, from the income generated by the ATP, should be in place to provide replacement carpets / floodlights to maintain the quality of this ATP.

#### 5.5.4 Action Plan

- Explore community use agreements and methods to extended hours of use at Highdown School, Abbey School and/or Leighton Park School as per Sport England guidance.

### 5.6 ARTIFICIAL PITCHES

5.6.1 Artificial Turf Pitches (ATPs) provide a playing surface suitable for all weathers and for a variety of sports, commonly hockey and football. Their playing surface is more durable and can be in constant use with little impact on their condition. There are two main types of artificial turf surface:

- 1) A sand filled surface (ATP) which is suitable for hockey but cannot be used for competitive football.
- 2) Artificial grass filled with rubber crumb, which is suitable for most sports, but not hockey. These can be termed third-generation (3G) or fourth-generation (4G). 3G and 4G are treated as interchangeable within this strategy and identified as 3G.

#### 5.6.2 Current Provision

There are currently 25 artificial pitches within the Borough.

Table 7 - 2020 ATP / 3G Pitch Provision				
Site	Pitch	Use	Number of Pitches	Size of Pitch
Rabsons Rec	3G Rubber Crumb	Football Adult 11 v 11	1	110x70
JMA*	3G Rubber Crumb	Football Adult 11 v 11	1	110x70
Prospect School*	3G Rubber Crumb	Football Youth 11 v 11	1	100x60
Madjeski Stadium*	3G Rubber Crumb (dome)	Football Junior 9 v 9	1	80x50
Palmer Park	3G Rubber Crumb	Training and recreational use	3	Small sided court (non-FA reg)
UoR*	3G Rubber Crumb	Football Mini 7 v 7	1	60x40
Prospect Park	Sand filled	Training and recreational use	1	Small sided court (non-FA reg)
Prospect Park	3G Rubber Crumb	Training and recreational use	5	Small sided court (non-FA reg)
Ibis*	3G Rubber Crumb	Football Mini 5 v 5	1	40x30
UoR*	3G Rubber Crumb	Football Mini 5 v 5	2	40x40
UoR*	ATP 110x70	Hockey	1	110x70
Highdown*	ATP 110 x 70	Hockey	1	110x70
Leighton Park*	ATP 110 x 70	Hockey	1	110x70
Ranikhet*	ATP 100 x 60	Hockey	1	100x60
Rivermead	ATP 100 x 60	Hockey	1	100x60
Abbey*	ATP 110 x 70	Hockey	1	110x70
The Wren School*	3G Rubber Crumb	Football Youth 11 v 11	1	100x60
<u>Cintra Park</u>	ATP	Training and recreational use	1	Small sided court (non-FA reg)

\* Non-RBC managed and based on PPS 2019 data

**5.6.3** The supply of small sided courts is important for supporting training and recreational activity however they are unable to accommodate matches and therefore outside the assessment of need within the PPS.

#### **5.6.4 Hockey**

The hockey demand is currently met by the supply of ATPs within the Borough. If England Hockey are successful in achieving their 100% increase in the number of people playing then an additional hockey ATP would be required to meet demand. With consideration given to the current demand and events over recent years, it seems this target is overly ambitious.

#### **5.6.5 Football**

To meet the current demand for football within the Borough, there needs to be seven 3G pitches. With only two FA approved 3G's within the Borough, there is a current shortfall of five full size 3G pitches (based on FA's training model 38 teams per full sized 3G).

The Local Football Facility Plan (LFFP) by the Football Foundation identifies opportunities to accurately target investment in football facilities across the Borough.

This has prioritised the investment in five full sized ATPs reflecting those identified within this strategy.

Using the FA's ratio [38 teams:1 full sized 3G pitch] the initial calculation to meet the future demand for football identified a need to supply nine full sized ATPs. The provision of small sided courts and youth 3G pitches across the Borough provide training facilities thus reducing the need for full sized artificial grass pitches. The shortfall is therefore five ATPs.

#### 5.6.6 Action Plan

- To provide a distribution of ATPs to best meet need, the following areas have been identified as potential locations and reflect areas identified for investment by the Football Foundation:
  - University of Reading / South Reading
  - East Reading
  - North of the River
  - Scours Lane
  - Conversion of Rivermead to 3G surface

### 5.7 GAELIC FOOTBALL, AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL AND LACROSSE

5.7.1 Gaelic Football and Australian Rules Football are both played within the Borough by single clubs on Council pitches. The provision of one pitch for either sport will meet demand. This provision will be protected.

5.7.2 Lacrosse is currently played at Ibis/Prudential on a hockey pitch. The same club also play at Reading University. This provision will be protected.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Table 8 below identifies the current supply and demand for football and identifies the total number of pitches required for 2036. Over the following 15 years pitch supply will be amended to meet the follow years predicted demand. This will be undertaken in consultation with clubs and leagues.

Table 8 - Summary of total Football Pitch Supply, Demand and 2036 Provision

	Current Pitch Supply	Peak Capacity	Current Demand Peak Sessions	Current Pitch Requirement	2036 Predicted Demand (sessions)	Total Grass Pitches Needed 2036	Total ATP Needed 2036
Adult 11 v 11	32	32	17	17	22	21	3
Youth 11 v 11	20	40	37	19	45	25	1
Junior 9 v 9	26	52	51	26	58	22	3
Mini 7 v 7	12	48	22	8	31	4	3
Mini 5 v 5	4	16	18	5	-	-	-
Full sized 3G/ATP (Included above)	2	4	14	7	18	-	9

6.1.1 As shown at 5.2.6 the supply of adult football pitches is identified to meet peak demand with all league games being played concurrently at peak times. This provides some spare capacity to allow for flexibility in provision across the Borough. This also accommodates anticipated training requirements.

6.2 Table 9 below identifies the current supply and future need for non-football team sport pitches across Reading.

Table 9 - Summary Non-Football Pitches Supply, Demand and 2036 Provision					
Sport	Current Pitch Supply	Current Pitch Requirement	2036 Predicted Demand Pitches	Total Grass Pitches Needed	Total ATP Needed
Hockey	6	6	7	0	7
Cricket Wickets	24* (112 sessions)	32 (129 sessions)	30 (118 sessions)	30	0
Rugby	6	3	6	7* <sup>1</sup>	0
Gaelic Football	1	1	1	1	0
Australian Rules Football	1	1	1	1	0
Lacrosse	1	1	1	1	0

\*Excludes pitches unavailable for community use

\*<sup>1</sup> This may be reduced to 6 if access to an existing pitch can be agreed for Reading Renegades

6.3 Appendix 2 shows a site action plan and recommendations for all pitches across the Borough. This outlines priorities for the future to enable to the Council to work towards providing adequate provision up to 2036.

#### 6.4 Key Issues

Within the PPS there are several key issues relating the current provision, allocation, maintenance and management of playing pitches in the Borough. These are summarised below:

##### 6.4.1 Pitch Quality

The PPS recommends that generally pitches in the Borough need improvement. Since 2019 RBC have started investing in the pitch infrastructure within the Borough. The significant findings relating to pitch quality within the Borough are listed below:

- The one-pitch sites are the best quality in the Borough along with Mapledurham Playing Fields.
- There is variation in quality of pitches across the various provider sectors in the Borough
- The maintenance of the pitches needs to be more consistent
- Poor drainage and flooding of some pitches results in cancellation of bookings and plus pitches out of action for significant periods during the season.
- Palmer Park is a key facility and improvement will provide significant benefit as funding becomes available
- There is potential for the Borough to provide fewer, higher quality pitches
- Investment in the existing pitches at South Reading Leisure Centre (Rabsons) has been made to address the issues of poor drainage, which impacts on the capacity of the pitch facilities
- Investment in the sports turf at Mapledurham has been made to improve drainage and maintain or improve the carrying capacity of the site.

##### 6.4.2 Car Parking

The majority of pitch sites have poor car parking - often this is limited on the site itself, which means that users have to park in surrounding residential roads.

##### 6.4.3 Pitch Location

Existing pitches are not necessarily located in the optimum places for usage by local communities, although the majority of sites are well-located in respect of public transport, often sited adjacent to key bus routes and stops.

#### 6.4.4 Pitch Booking/Allocation

- The allocation of pitches is carried out by the leagues
- Moving forwards there will be a need to move clubs 'home' locations to meet the proposed 2036 pitch provision model. The re-allocation of pitches is required to ensure adequate provision is maintained. The development of facilities will be dependent on available funding and changing demand over the years leading to 2036.

### 7. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

7.1 Reading Borough Council's vision is: *'To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.'*

7.2 The recommendations and action plans within this report contribute to the following Corporate Plan Themes:

#### Healthy environment

As mentioned at 5.2.3 increasing the total area of grass pitches to meet the Fields in Trust standard is not desirable, given the increasing demand for open space and the response to Climate Change (The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25), for example the increased planting of trees to increase canopy cover to 25% by 2030 (RBC Tree Strategy, 2021). The recommendations within this report concentrate on the improvement in quality (and consequent carrying capacity) of pitches and the installation of ATPs which have a significantly higher usage rate minimising the amount of green space used for pitches allowing land to be used for other activities.

#### Thriving Communities

The actions and recommendations within this report contribute to improving and promoting access to physical activity. Encouraging participation in physical activity contributes towards a thriving community through tackling the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic by improving mental health, reducing social isolation and improving physical health. Sports clubs using many of the facilities provide very valuable local physical and social activity which reduces ASB and pathways to further constructive activity.

#### Inclusive economy

Clubs with leases and those who complete pitch bookings provide an income to fund the upkeep and maintenance of pitches. The future installation of ATPs contributes to the development of affordable modern sports facilities which promotes Reading as a destination for physical activity supporting community organisations and activity providing both volunteering and some paid coaching opportunities locally.

7.3 Full details of the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) are available on the website and include information on the projects which will deliver these priorities.

#### 7.4 Reading Borough Local Plan, 2019

Reading's Local Plan sets out a clear vision which includes providing access to adequate facilities and open green space to enable residents to have what they need to live a full and active life. The Local Plan envisages Reading becoming a desirable place for leisure and recreational activities. The objectives within the Local Plan demonstrate the importance of meeting residents' needs through providing access to sport and recreation facilities, including sports pitches.

The Local Plan illustrates that future developments within the Borough need to be balanced against the adequate provision of sports and play space. The Local Plan states three key regulations regarding future developments and the retention / provision of sports facilities and pitches:

- EN8, states that any development should not result in the loss of or jeopardise use and enjoyment of undesignated open space. Development may be permitted where it is clearly demonstrated that replacement of open space, of a similar standard and function, can be provided at an accessible location close by, or that improvements to recreational facilities on remaining open space can be provided to a level sufficient to outweigh the loss of the open space. The quality of existing open space should not be eroded by insensitive development on adjoining land.
- OU1, states that sports pitches and playing fields, should only be developed where: a) an assessment clearly shows the area to be surplus to requirements; or b) the loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.
- RL6, states that developments that would result in the loss of a leisure facility will not be permitted unless it can be clearly demonstrated that: a. There is no need for this type of facility in this area; or b. The function of the facility can be adequately fulfilled by an existing facility, or a facility proposed as part of the development, where that facility would be at least as accessible to the same catchment; or 101 Centres where there are recognised deprivation issues are Coronation Square, Dee Park, Whitley and Whitley Wood c. Unless the site is a sports or recreation facility, the impacts on amenity of residents or on crime and security of retaining the facility could not be dealt with through other measures, and would be so severe as to outweigh the benefits to the wider community of retaining the facility.

#### **7.5 Reading Open Space Strategy, 2007 (updated 2018)**

The Open Space Strategy set out the aims and approaches that the Council have adopted to protect the Borough's open spaces. The protection of publicly accessible recreational open space is considered to be of great importance. This is useable space which provides a resource for sport, leisure and informal recreation.

Public open space helps to achieve various Council aims including improving the quality of life for residents, adapting to climate change and enhancing the natural environment to contribute to economic success. This ensures that Reading is healthy and enhances biodiversity.

The Open Space Strategy outlines the Council's principle aims. One of which is to ensure that there is no net loss of recreational public open space. It acknowledges that open space makes an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. It also acknowledges that quality of public open space varies throughout the Borough.

#### **7.6 Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 2021-2030**

The emerging Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2030, due to be published in Autumn 2021, has five priorities:

- Priority 1: Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people
- Priority 2: Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives
- Priority 3: Help families and children in early years
- Priority 4: Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people
- Priority 5: Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults



The Health and Wellbeing Strategy acknowledges that physical activity is a contributing factor to Children and Young People's mental and physical health and highlights the importance of improving access to physical activity. The strategy notes that due to the pandemic there is increased importance on participation in physical activity for the prevention of ill-health and the need to break down barriers to accessing physical activity.

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1** The overall impact of the recommendations / actions within this report on the environment and climate is low.
- 8.2** As previously mentioned at 5.2.3, The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 highlights the need for increased canopy cover to 25% by 2030 (RBC Tree Strategy, 2021). The proposals within this report consider this, maximise use of space minimising pressure on open space creating opportunities for further mitigation of the impacts of climate change.
- 8.3** Through the rearrangement of sports pitches in the future including leasing of 'home' grounds to local clubs and a geographical spread of ATP's close to the communities they serve will lessen the need to travel.
- 8.4** The installation of several ATPs between now and 2036 will have a low positive impact on the biodiversity within the Borough. Whilst an artificial pitch surface does not provide a habitat, they will reduce the use of grass pitches thus freeing greenspace for phase one habitats supporting implementation of Reading's tree Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan, 2021).

## **9. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 9.1** Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".
- 9.2** Consultation with the community and local clubs took place to produce this report and the PPS in 2019. The Council has a strong working relationship with local leagues and clubs. This includes lease and site management agreements at various sites across the Borough.
- 9.3** The Council will continue to engage with principal partners, leagues and clubs (those with and without lease agreements) from April - June to ensure provision for the following season best meets need. In order to accommodate all needs clubs will need to be flexible to ensure provision can be supplied in an effective way.

## **10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)**

- 10.1** Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
  - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 10.2** An EIA is not required for the recommendations set out in this report. Traditionally, grass pitches have supporting infrastructure of limited size and quality and often struggle to accommodate mixed genders and have limited accessible facilities. By their nature, grass pitches have a limited ability to meet the needs of disabled people.
- 10.3** New facilities will be subject to further assessment at the design stage of proposed development, but improvements in accessibility and support infrastructure will facilitate use by a growing range of users. This coupled with the redevelopment of indoor leisure facilities will provide a significant improvement in facilities provide to all communities.
- 10.4** Some of the sports addressed within this strategy have traditionally been played by men (Rugby, Football, Australian Rules Football, Gaelic Football and Cricket). However, whilst historically these sports have been male dominated this is now changing and provision between now and 2036 is being made to promote use by both males and females.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1** Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 confers on local authorities' general powers to provide recreational facilities, including) outdoor facilities consisting of pitches for team games, Further, the Local Government Act 2000 provides local authorities with the discretionary power to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of their area. The provision of the playing pitches falls within the above statutory provisions.

## **12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1** The maintenance costs of all RBC managed pitches within this report are met through existing identified revenue budgets. The costs of relocating and resizing pitches to meet requirements is also accounted for in existing identified budgets. Whilst there are no direct financial commitments arising from the strategy proposals, it does provide a framework for future investment, any proposal adversely affecting the budget will be subject to a subsequent decision process.
- 12.2** The majority of RBC owned / managed sites are leased to third-party groups. It is expected that joint funding applications will be made to external funders for required improvements in ancillary facilities.
- 12.3** The periodic review of pitches and accompanying ancillary provision may provide opportunity for the rationalisation of changing facilities, at Victoria Recreation Ground for example, which would provide future savings. If in future assessments of provision any support infrastructure is found to be redundant there will be capital costs associated with its removal.
- 12.4** The development of ATPs will require external funding. As the proposals for the development of ATPs align to the Football Foundations' LFFP it is likely funding will come from the Football Association and Capital Grant Funding. Once ATPs are developed all operating costs, including sink funding for refurbishment, will be covered by the income generated through ATP use.
- 12.5** s106 funding may be secured in relation to the re-provision of lost football facilities as result of the proposed development. Additionally, funding applications will be made as required to CIL and developer contributions will be sought to meet demand within localities of new developments, predominantly for match funding to support application to funding bodies.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**11.1** Playing Pitch Strategy, 2019

**11.2** Reading Local Football Facilities Plan (LFFP)