

INTERIM REPORT ON PITCHING IT RIGHT FOR DEVON! A PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY FOR DEVON

Bennett Leisure & Planning Ltd was commissioned in November 2009 to undertake a Sport England compliant Playing Pitch Strategy, to meet the requirement for the completion of an up-to-date Playing Fields Strategy prior to the BSF remit meeting.

The playing pitch methodology, as supported by Sport England, involves auditing all pitch sites on quality, quantity and accessibility, collating information on all teams playing, matching supply with demand at peak times and from this considering a range of options according to whether there is an undersupply or – in rare instances – an oversupply in a particular area. However, the methodology is only truly applicable to grass pitches, and in assessing synthetic turf pitches Sport England recommends that use is made of its Facilities Planning Model which has recently been used to undertake an assessment of the supply and demand of these facilities. At present there is no definitive guidance as to the various surfaces which can be used (meeting the needs of hockey or football, but not generally both). Appropriate non playing pitch sports include netball, tennis and basketball which require an assessment of the court provision for each sport and of multi use games areas

The Strategy will ensure a strategic approach to playing field provision for planning, leisure and education departments, and provide a robust evidence base to inform investment, management and planning decisions which will lead to the prioritising of actions to address deficiencies. It will also aid the delivery of the BSF transformation agenda for PE and sport by informing key decisions relating to:

- The strategic planning and design of the estate
- The nature and extent of community use
- The management and maintenance of playing field land.

This information will be key to both the PE and sport stakeholder group and wider BSF project team in addressing curriculum, extra curriculum and community needs for playing field land. An agreed Strategy will provide the necessary information to allow both the local planning authority and Sport England as a statutory consultee to adequately assess any BSF proposals affecting playing field land, thereby reducing potential delays in the planning process.

The consultants are very aware of the importance of school based sports facilities – in many areas, intensifying the use on school sites and/or opening pitches up for greater community use may be the only realistic way of meeting rising demand for sport and the BSF programme offers an unparalleled opportunity now to make full and effective use of school based sports facilities. The consultants regularly attend meetings organised by Partnership for Schools in London to discuss the issues relating to sport and recreation on BSF sites.

The Consultants have taken as their starting point the five schools in the first tranche – Dartmouth (South Hams), Chulmleigh (North Devon) and Ilfracombe (North Devon) Community Colleges, Tiverton High School (Mid Devon) and Marland Special School (Torrige). All of these schools have been visited and audited. From this focus, they are also considering provision in the four authorities of South Hams, North Devon, Mid Devon and Torrige. The consultants have a good underlying knowledge of these authorities – having carried out playing pitch assessments in each of them previously – and are augmenting this by site visits and analysis of other surveys, reports and strategies.

Work undertaken to date and ongoing includes:

- Auditing of some 170 sites (around 38%) of the total
- All secondary schools in the county have been sent a questionnaire on their facilities and plans/aspirations for the future, particularly in relation to playing pitch and outdoor sport provision.
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- All town and parish councils in the four authorities have been invited to submit their comments as to the adequacy of the provision of pitches, courts and multi use games in their areas, and desired new provision and improvements
- All known pitch sports clubs in the four authorities and in adjacent areas have been sent a questionnaire, to furnish information required by the Sport England playing pitch methodology. League Secretaries are also being contacted, where appropriate.
- All pitch and court sports governing body representatives and County Sports Development Officers have been invited to comment, either in meetings, or via email/letter
- Meetings have been held with Leisure and Planning Officers from the four authorities
- Consultations to take place with Active Devon and BSF Stakeholder Group and other strategic partners.

Draft reports for each of the four authorities (with a joint overview for Torrige and North Devon) are currently being prepared. The format of these are suggested as follows:

- Summary of Key issues
- Introduction
- Method
- Context
- Existing Situation
- Key Findings from Consultation
- Standards of Provision
- Application of Standards

- Issues, Options and a Way Forward
- Action Plan
- Technical Reports dealing with specific sports: Football, Cricket, Rugby, Hockey, Outdoor Court Sports, Artificial Turf Surfaces and Multi use games areas.

The consultants are designing these reports to be fully accessible on the web, by providing links within documents to the specialist technical reports, the audit forms, appendices and photos. Mapping of sites and catchment areas is already well underway, and will be presented at a meeting of the Strategy Steering Group in early February. It is hoped that a Draft Report will be available in March, with certain information available prior to this. The Consultants are very happy to answer questions, or to include further comments. Please email kevin@belap.co.uk or phone 01626 333308.

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10/01/10