

6 December 2016		ITEM: 7
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Active Place Strategy Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Grant Greatrex, Sports & Leisure Policy & Development Manager		
Accountable Head of Service: Sue Harper, Interim Head of Environment		
Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Corporate Director Environment and Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

The Active Place Strategy is an evidence base piece of work being developed to support the emerging Local Plan and ensure that Thurrock has appropriate sports, leisure and open space infrastructure in future that can contribute to the corporate priorities. To date assessments have been carried out to identify current provision and need with a view to developing longer term strategies aligned to the Local Plan. This report highlights work undertaken so far and some of the key findings.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 To note progress on the Active Place Strategy.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Following a competitive tendering process the consultants Knight, Kavanagh & Page were appointed by the council to develop the Active Place Strategy with engagement from Sport England. When complete the work will contain four main strands, which are:

- Indoor Sports and Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy
- Outdoor Sports and Leisure Assessment and Strategy
- Open Space and Play Areas Assessment and Standards
- Active Travel Strategy

2.2 Sport and physical activity has benefits beyond just 'sport for sports sake'. Being physically active is an essential link to good health and therefore it makes a significant contribution to the health and well-being agenda for

Thurrock. Playing sport also helps with skill development and can lead to formal qualifications, helps with community development and well-managed outdoor sports facilities make a major contribution to the management and maintenance of the local environment. The development of an active places strategy will help ensure good quality facilities are provided where they are most needed in Thurrock to help ensure local people have the best opportunity to be active in their chosen activity and sport at the level they want.

2.3 The purpose of the strategy is to be a supporting document for the Local Plan and as an aid to facilitate development. The Strategy will cover all facilities in Thurrock, including council, voluntary sector privately-owned ones, and will cover the period up to 2035, in line with the Local Plan period. The main objectives of the Strategy are to:

- Identify current supply and demand issues for sports and recreation facilities and open spaces in Thurrock, based on quality, service quantity and accessibility.
- To enable the Council to plan appropriately for the protection and/or enhancement of existing sport and recreation facilities, open spaces and access.
- To enable the Council to plan appropriately for the creation of new sport and recreation facilities and open spaces.
- To identify whether existing infrastructure is fit for purpose to deliver outcomes in an efficient way, now and in the future.
- Provide a robust, transparent and effective means of justifying standards proposed in the Local Plan.
- Help direct expenditure of any future Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies and Section 106 planning contributions for sport and open space facilities.
- Provide evidence to justify the provision of new sport and recreation facilities or enhancement of existing facilities.
- Identify how sport, recreation, open space and access to the natural environment can contribute to the Council's corporate agenda, including the Council's responsibility for public health, to deliver healthier lifestyles and achieve positive health outcomes.
- Identify possible external funding opportunities for sport and leisure provision.
- Identify possible external funding opportunities for open space provision and access to the natural environment.

- Identify opportunities for efficiency savings at Council-owned facilities and options for asset transfer to charities, trusts, or community-run organisations
- 2.4 Early draft reports have now been developed for the first phase of this work, which is the supply and demand needs assessment for: indoor sports; outdoor sports; and open space. The council has finalised the specification for the Active Travel element of the Active Place Strategy, which will focus on identifying key sustainable routes to/between open space and leisure facilities, as well as opportunities for new provision including linking open spaces and sports facilities with urban centres and employment areas. The complete Active Place Strategy is expected to be completed by summer 2017.
- 2.5 In addition to the above the current ten year Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan needs to be refreshed by 2017. This plan is currently being reviewed and updated as part of the Active Place Strategy work. It will help highlight key routes that require upgrading, which will in turn help deliver the Active Travel aims.
- 2.6 Any future facility strategies will need to be supported by a broad range of activities, programmes and targeted work from a range of organisations and partners.

3. Issues and Options

3.1 Summary of Indoor Sports and Leisure Needs Assessment

- 3.2 Long term investment in indoor facilities for sport and recreation throughout Thurrock has been limited for a number of years. External influences such as the recession, cancellation of the Building Schools for the Future programme, the disbandment of the Gateway Development Corporation and budget restrictions have impacted upon internal priorities for Council investment. The result is dated and aging facilities that residents accept and “make do with”. This has also contributed to Thurrock having a modest sports club infrastructure and performing below the national and regional averages within all aspects of active sports participation
- 3.3 The enduring spirit of Thurrock residents has allowed international athletes to develop in the area. However, in order to convert these high profile gains into ensuring that sport and physical activity become part of residents everyday lives and contributes to their health and well-being there is a need to transform the existing leisure portfolio and create inspiring, modern and fit for purpose venues that can stimulate participation.
- 3.4 Thurrock is able to accommodate some increased demand for sports halls from its existing supply of facilities through increasing the availability of some school facilities. However, the quality of facilities is variable and investment is required to upgrade at least 50% of the stock. Thurrock also has no sports

halls available during the day, so the accessibility needs of time rich, older residents, people working irregular hours, and young people during school holidays will need to be considered. Additional sports hall provision will be required to accommodate the increase in population and the opportunity exists to develop some of this supply through the provision of new secondary schools in the area.

- 3.5 Water space at publicly accessible swimming pools is fully programmed and operating at capacity in peak periods. The age of the Thurrock swimming pool stock is a major concern and, unless addressed, will impact on the viability, sustainability and net cost of operating these facilities. Swimming is a popular recreational and club activity in Thurrock and has the potential to be the activity of choice for residents new to exercise who would like to become more active.
- 3.6 Thurrock is in urgent need of new swimming pool provision to replace the existing stock and to meet the shortfall in needs of a growing population. Without investment in new facilities there is a danger that Thurrock could be left with no public pools as the existing pool buildings are already beyond their anticipated life expectancy and are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain and keep open.
- 3.7 Within any new sports facility developments the council will need to design in financial viability through the development of high quality health and fitness provision and other key income generating activities in order to offset the cost of operating facilities such as swimming pools and sports halls.
- 3.8 Thurrock has a limited number of specialist sports facilities, with a mix of public, private and voluntary providers. As a minimum these facilities will need to be protected and maintained. The growth in popularity and participation of gymnastics suggests the need for a permanent facility.
- 3.9 The following themes will need to be considered within the development of the Thurrock Indoor Sport and Leisure Facilities Strategy:
 - There is a need to ensure that the council's sports facility infrastructure is geared up to contribute to the delivery of interventions designed to address Thurrock's health inequalities.
 - The opportunity exists to consider how new sport and physical activity provision could link with Thurrock's aspiration to develop integrated healthy living centres.
 - There is a need to replace all of the council's core leisure facilities and to increase the size and scale of swimming provision.
 - There is a need to increase the number of sport and physical activity facilities, including swimming pools, in line with the identified housing and population growth in the area

- The council will need to work with external funding agencies to identify funds to improve the quality of its school sports hall provision.
- There is a need to ensure that all school sports facilities are made available for community use (through community use agreements) and that an agreed minimum level of availability is agreed. This will require the Council to negotiate with some schools to substantially increase their availability.
- The opportunity exists to develop new sports and physical activity facilities alongside appropriate new schools, required as a result of population growth.
- There is a need to ensure that new swimming pools are complemented with high quality health and fitness provision. Not only is 'working out' and fitness classes popular but membership revenue plays an important role in income generation, which in turn can make a positive contribution to the business model potentially eliminating the need for revenue subsidy.
- Where appropriate, the development of new indoor provision should be aligned to open spaces with facilities for active recreation and play. For example this could include, play equipment (for all ages), cycling, walking and pram/buggy routes, fixed orienteering routes, outdoor gyms, Parkrun venues, skate / BMX parks, parkour etc.
- There is a need to identify ongoing investment to maintain and protect existing sports facilities and to undertake key elements of refurbishment.

3.10 Summary of Outdoor Sports and Leisure Needs Assessment

3.11. Assessments of the quantity, quality and accessibility of the pitches listed below were undertaken irrespective of ownership, management and use.

- Football pitches (including 3G AGPs)
- Cricket pitches
- Rugby union pitches
- Hockey pitches (sand based AGPs)
- Outdoor tennis courts
- Outdoor bowling greens
- Outdoor athletics tracks
- Outdoor netball courts

3.12 The assessments were conducted via user consultation and site visits to inspect pitches and changing accommodation etc.

3.13 A variety of consultation methods were used to collate demand information about leagues, clubs, county associations and national/regional governing bodies of sport. Face to face consultation was carried out with representatives from key clubs from each sport. This allowed for the collection of detailed

demand information and an exploration of key issues to be interrogated and more accurately assessed.

- 3.14 For data analysis purposes an online survey (converted to postal where required) was utilised. This was sent to all clubs not covered by face to face consultation.
- 3.15 County associations and regional governing body officers advised which of the clubs to include in the face to face consultation. Sport England was also included within the consultation process prior to the project commencing. Issues identified by clubs returning questionnaires were followed up by telephone or face to face interviews.
- 3.16 The response rates of the consultation have been as follows:

Sport providers	Total number	Number responding	Response rate	Methods of consultation
Football clubs	91	49	54%	Face to Face, Online Survey
Football teams	274	214	78%	
Cricket clubs	4	4	100%	Face to Face, Online Survey
Rugby union clubs	4	4	100%	Online Survey
Hockey clubs	1	1	100%	Online Survey, Telephone Consultation
Tennis clubs	1	1	100%	Online Survey
Bowls clubs	14	11	79%	Online Survey, Postal Survey
Athletics clubs	1	1	100%	Telephone consultation
Colleges	1	1	100%	Face to Face
Secondary schools	10	10	100%	Face to Face
Primary schools	39	28	71%	Online Survey

- 3.17 Consideration was also given to the capacity of pitches to regularly provide competitive play, training and other activity over a season (which is mostly determined by their quality).
- 3.18 The sport by sport findings of the draft study can be found in **Appendix A**

3.19 Summary of Open Space and Play Areas Needs Assessment

3.20 The Open Space Assessment comprised an audit of the different types of open space available within Thurrock to assess their overall quality and value. The Standards document considered the results of the audit and identified policy advice and recommendations for how the council should develop its open space provision.

3.21 Seven open space typologies were considered and the table below shows the number of sites and total area of each category.

Typology of open space	Number of sites	Total area (hectares)
Parks and gardens	24	68
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	40	1255
Amenity greenspace	102	189
Provision for children and young people	64	7
Allotments	27	31
Cemeteries/churchyards	12	21
Civic space	5	2

3.22 Each site was visited and assessed to establish its quality and value against agreed criteria. This information was used to identify any particular deficiencies in provision and where improvements and investment should be directed.

3.23 The assessment identified that there were some deficiencies of certain topologies within the parts of the borough, however it was considered that the gaps in provision was served by other sites of different typologies. As a result it was considered that there were no significant overall deficiencies in open space provision within the borough.

3.24 However, future population growth within the borough would result in the need for additional open space and the estimate of requirements was calculated based on the projected population for 2035.

3.25 The quality assessment followed site visit criteria used for Green Flag, the only national benchmark for assessing open space quality. This involved assessing the condition and suitability of a wide range of factors including play equipment, park furniture, paths and cleanliness.

3.26 A high value site was considered to be one that was well used by the local community, well maintained (with a balance for conservation), provided a safe environment and had features of interest; for example, good quality play equipment and landscaping. Sites that provided for a cross section of users and had a multi-functional use were considered a higher value than those offering limited functions and viewed as unattractive.

3.27 The assessments found that the quality of sites varied significantly between the different typologies. Over half of the amenity greenspace was rated below the threshold for quality. There was an even split between parks and gardens being above and below the threshold.

3.28 The vast majority of sites (85%) were considered to be of value to the local community.

3.29 Next Steps

3.30 The next phase of the Active Place Strategy work will take place after the Council has agreed the Local Plan Issues and Options 2 document in March 2017.

3.31 Once the decisions of the Local Plan Issues and Options have been agreed, the assessments referred to within this report will be utilised to develop the future strategies for; Indoor Sports; Outdoor Sports; Open Space; and Active Travel. These will then be encompassed within the overarching Active Place Strategy.

3.32 The evolving active place strategies will be presented for Overview and Scrutiny throughout 2017/18.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Not applicable as no recommendation made.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 The details of consultation have been included within the main body of this report.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 An Active Place Strategy will impact in a positive way on the Corporate Priorities, specifically with regards to;

- ✓ Building pride, responsibility and respect
- ✓ Improving health and well-being
- ✓ Promoting and protect our clean and green environment

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Finance Officer

There are no direct implications arising from this progress report.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Deputy Head of Law & Governance

There are no direct implications arising from this progress report.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development & Equalities Manger

There are no direct implications arising from this progress report. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be developed as part of the further strategy development process.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

There are no direct implications arising from this progress report.

10. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

11. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1

Report Author:

Grant Greatrex, Sports & Leisure Policy & Development Manager