

13 January 2021		ITEM: 14 Decision: 110548
Cabinet		
Thurrock Active Place Strategy		
Wards and communities affected: All wards	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Aaron Watkins, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Sports and Leisure		
Accountable Assistant Director: Leigh Nicholson, Interim Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection/Darren Spring, Assistant Director of Environment, Highways and Counter Fraud		
Accountable Director: Andy Millard, Director of Place/Julie Rogers, Director of Environment, Highways and Counter Fraud.		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

As part of the preparation of the new Local Plan the Council commissioned the 'Thurrock Active Place Strategy' (APS), a suite of studies to act as an up to date evidence base and to help inform future decision-making processes. The Local Plan, once adopted, will replace the currently adopted 'Core Strategy and Policies for Management of Development' (Core Strategy) and will become the statutory planning document for Thurrock. The new Local Plan will identify where future development in Thurrock will be located and set out the policies which will be used to assess future planning applications. It will also identify specific sites for development for a wide range of uses, including open spaces and indoor and outdoor sports facilities, as well as the optimal sustainable routes from and between both existing sites and future development sites.

The APS consists of four discrete strands covering Open Space and Play areas; Indoor and Built Sports Facilities; Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport; and an Active Travel Strategy, each of which includes a separate assessment of current provision and a strategy (standards for open space) report setting out strategic recommendations and targeted specific actions for how each can be improved/increased/delivered over the Local Plan period (the Active Travel Strategy combines assessment and strategy into a single report). The documents will help inform the requirements for such forms of provision with regard to future housing need and consequent population growth.

The APS has not only been developed within the context of the Council's Corporate Plan and vision for Health and Wellbeing, but also within the context of consultation with key partners who will share the responsibility for the delivery of the strategic outcomes.

In delivering each of the studies all relevant national guidance and methodology has been followed to ensure that Thurrock has a robust evidence base that informs future planning policy, the Council's wider investment decisions and how the Council can best position itself to attract inward investment into the Borough.

Having this APS in place and adopted as a robust evidence base to the Local Plan will also allow the Council to fulfil and deliver on its broader health and well-being objectives, deliver on its sports and recreation facility objectives over the Local Plan period, and also strongly position the Council in bidding for any government or organisational funding to support these objectives, as well as negotiating for funding through future development proposals.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Thurrock Active Place Strategy, which consists of:

- **The Thurrock Indoor Built Facilities Assessment and Strategy**
- **The Thurrock Playing Pitch Assessment and Strategy**
- **The Thurrock Active Travel Strategy**
- **The Thurrock Open Space Assessment and Standards Report**

be approved by Cabinet.

1.2 To instruct Officers to progress the recommendations arising from the Thurrock Active Place Strategy and update them within the context of feedback from committee stage discussions.

1.3 To incorporate inclusive consultation plans within each key project.

1.4 To report progress to Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in autumn of 2021.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the planning policies for England, detailing how these are expected to be applied to the planning system and providing a framework to produce distinct local plans reflecting the needs and priorities of local communities. It states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and establishes that to do this the planning system needs to focus on three themes: economic, social and environmental.

2.2 Under paragraph 73 of the NPPF, it is set out that planning policies 'should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space,

sports and recreation facilities, and opportunities for new provision'. Specific needs and quantitative and qualitative deficiencies, as well as surpluses in local areas, should also be identified to inform what provision is required in an area.

- 2.3 Paragraph 74 of NPPF further states that existing open space, sports and recreation sites, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:
- An assessment has been undertaken, which has clearly shown the site to be surplus to requirements; or
 - The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
 - The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.
- 2.4 Responding primarily to the need to have a robust evidence base in place from which to develop sound and suitable policies for open space and sports provision in the emerging Local Plan, in November 2015 the Council commissioned consultants Knight, Kavanagh & Page (KKP) to prepare the APS. Working alongside KKP is a multi-disciplinary steering group including senior officers of key departments within the Council (Planning, Transport, Health, Environment and Education) as well as external agencies as and when relevant (Sport England, Public Health England).
- 2.5 Formal approval and adoption of the updated APS by Cabinet would signal endorsement of the strategy as the basis of robust and sound policy development as well as for providing the strategic direction of future open space and sports facilities provision for the Borough. Furthermore, a formally approved APS offers the robust basis from which to secure funding from Sport England, central Government and other relevant bodies for the improvement/provision of such facilities within the Borough.
- 2.6 All of these strategies were developed before the outbreak of COVID 19. However, the strategies retain the flexibility to address emerging issues and changing trends through the ongoing and further development of the strategic recommendations. Furthermore, the APS will be subject to regular and periodic review as the Local Plan progresses and as new development coming on stream may begin to offer opportunities for leisure, recreation and new open space through the more detailed place-making processes. Additionally, with specific reference to playing pitches and the strategy the Sport England guidelines requests a review every two years, which will also offer the opportunity for updated Facilities Planning Modelling (FPM) work to also be input into regular assessment of facility need, ensuring flexibility of the overall strategy as development and new facilities come on stream.
- 2.7 These strategic documents set out the longer term needs assessments and resulting recommendations for facilities and infrastructure. However, it is recognised that this will need to be underpinned with targeted and accessible

interventions and activities to encourage, support and promote physical activity to all sections of the community.

- 2.8 It must be remembered that the Active Place is a long term ambitious strategy and will not be delivered over night. The recommendations will take many years to deliver against and will evolve over time to take account of and respond to changing circumstances and opportunities.
- 2.9 The recommendations arising from these strategies offer an exciting opportunity to create an infrastructure to support active and healthy lifestyles by working collaboratively with wider interest partners such as; health, schools, clubs, funding partners and the commercial and voluntary.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 As set out in paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 above, in order to comply with NPPF it is incumbent upon a local authority to demonstrate that it has carried out an up to date assessment of its open space, sports and recreation facilities. In the absence of having such assessments and strategic steer in place as evidence to the Local Plan, the risk to the Council would be that at Examination in Public the plan would most likely be found unsound by an inspector as any policies on open space or sporting facilities would have no evidential base. This would have considerable financial implications to the Council by way of time and investment allocated to the plan making process.
- 3.2 A further considerable advantage in having an approved APS in place is that it will position Thurrock strongly when bidding for central government funding for open space and sports facilities improvements or any other funding opportunities that may become available from, for example, national governing bodies or sporting institutions, as well as when seeking Section 106 contributions from development towards open space and sports facilities provision.
- 3.3 Sport England, a member of the APS steering group, has recently been engaged in significant investment programmes throughout the nation and has indicated that a Council-endorsed strategy in place for sports facilities and playing pitches greatly increases the opportunities for funding. The FA has also been engaged on a large-scale investment programme and is seeking suitable locations with evidence bases in place for playing pitch strategies with identified need.
- 3.4 Working collaboratively with such a range of key partners and within the context of corporate priorities, the following common vision across the APS has been established:

To create a network of high quality, accessible and sustainable sport and leisure facilities, which offer inclusive services for all; enabling the inactive to become active and more residents to fulfil their potential by participating in

sport and physical activity, thus improving their long-term health and well-being

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The reasons for recommendation are:

- To give Council approval to the evidence base to be used for relevant sound policy development in the Local Plan;
- to set the strategic framework for the improvement/enhancement of open space, sports facilities, playing pitches and active travel routes in the Borough;
- to have a Council endorsed APS in place that can be used to assist funding bids from national and governmental bodies for open space and sports facility improvements in the Borough; and
- to have a robust evidence base in place when securing Section 106 contributions from developers for provision of/improvements to the local open space and sports facilities infrastructure.

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

5.1 Each of the strands making up the APS was subject to extensive consultation/engagement as part of their initial development (the Playing Pitch Strategy element being formally signed off by Sport England as well as all of the participating National Governing Bodies). In advance of this recommendation to Cabinet for approval of the APS the respective initial strategies (with assessment overview provided for information) were also subject to a more general six-week consultation via the Council website, for which the respective Reports of Consultation are included in Appendix 2.

5.2 An APS report and presentation was made to the Health and Wellbeing Board on 26 Nov 2020. In summary, the Board were supportive of the Strategies and would like to ensure that as work evolves, wider consultation takes place. This should specifically include those with disabilities and hard to reach community groups. For example, Officers should ensure that the works links to the recently approved Autism strategy.

5.3 An APS report and presentation was made to the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 December 2020. In summary, the Committee welcomed the work and were supportive of the Strategies. The Committee were keen to see the actions arising from the report implemented and progressed.

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

6.1 Approving the APS and engaging the suggestions in the strategy will have a direct positive influence on one of the Council's five key priorities and an indirect positive influence on two others. 'Improve health and well-being' will

be directly addressed by both improving and enhancing the open spaces and sports facilities throughout the Borough as well as by providing connections between key destinations in the Borough that can be connected and accessed via sustainable travel networks. There will also be the direct effect on this priority by working to encourage non-active people to become active and by providing a wider range of facilities and activities more suited to existing and future populations.

- 6.2 There will also be the indirect impact on two further Council priorities, those of to 'Create a great place for learning and opportunity' and 'Protect and promote our clean and green environment'. The consequence of both direct and indirect impacts of these Council priorities would be a broad overall positive impact on the present and future communities of Thurrock.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**
Interim Senior Management Accountant

The APS work has been commissioned and funded as part of the Local Plan evidence base to meet the requirements of NPPF. There are no direct financial implications arising from the APS or any of its four strands. At a later stage there will be financial implications arising from the development of the respective recommendations included within them, but these will be subject to their own discrete financial assessments and respective business cases at that time.

The approval of the APS will position the Council strongly for providing the basis for policy development in the emerging Local Plan as well as providing a robust evidence base for sourcing external funding and investment and additionally for being able to negotiate Section 106 contributions arising from development within the Borough and with a direct bearing on the supply and/or need for provision for open space and/or sporting facilities.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer

This report sets out how the preparation of the APS is necessary to provide the requisite evidence for the development of the Local Plan as per the relevant requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Officer

This report sets out how the preparation of the APS has been undertaken in a manner consistent with meeting wider corporate objectives as well as the Council's vision for health and well-being, all of which is underpinned by promoting equality of opportunity. General consultation exercises were undertaken on all of the final draft documents, details on responses are contained in appendix 2, they were open to all members of the community for feedback and comment though it is noted that response rate was low.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children)

Health – the strategy sets out recommendations that if pursued can help lead to a broad improvement to the health and wellbeing of residents of Thurrock.
Sustainability – the strategy sets out recommendations that if pursued can lead to a network of open spaces, sports facilities and active travel connections that can play a major part in the future sustainability of the Borough.

8. 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.

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Executive Summary to APS
- Appendix 2 – Consultation undertaken on APS

Report Author:

Rob Cotter, Principal Planning Officer, Growth & Strategy

Grant Greatrex, Sports & Leisure Policy and Development Manager