

South Oxfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy Assessment Conclusions

HOCKEY

September, 2024

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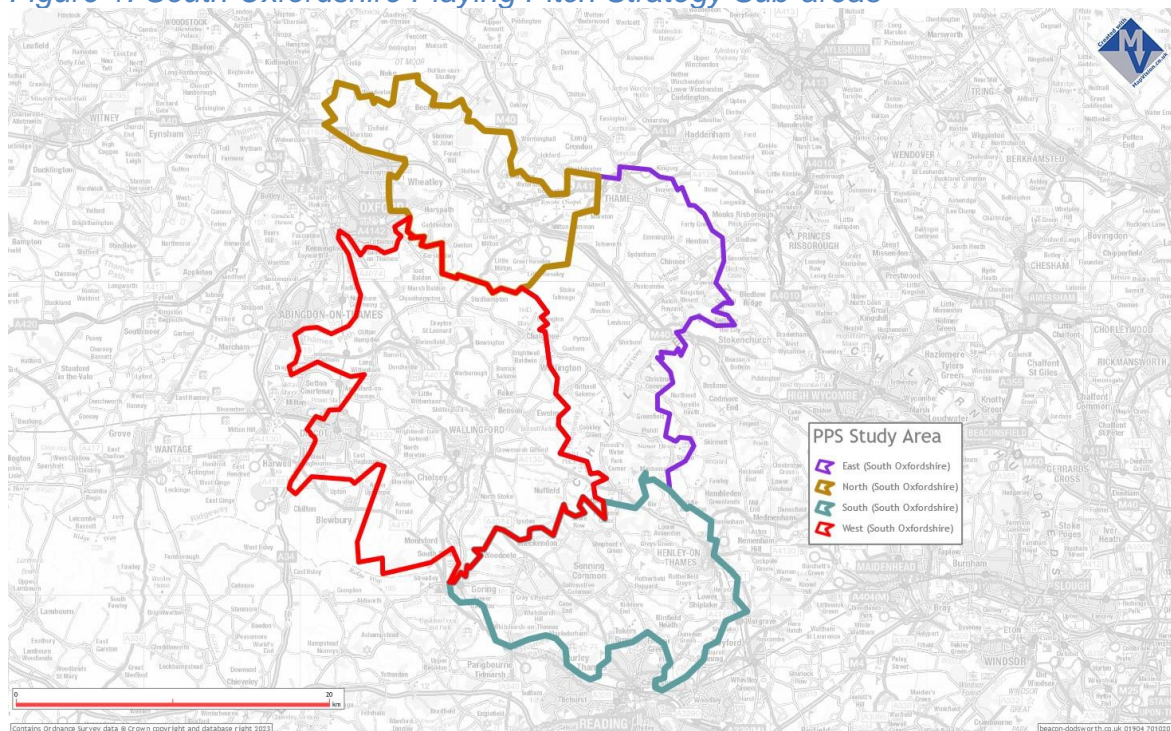
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HOCKEY ASSESSMENT CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

1. This assessment uses data set out at length in the Assessment Tables, most of which are not repeated here. This is to make this report easily digestible and easy to understand. By necessity, this report summarises data as necessary and relates to as little detail as possible while still conveying the key points and issues required to arrive at conclusions and recommendations. Much of the place-specific data is set out in this report by sub-area. For clarity, the map below shows the areas covered by the sub-areas.

Figure 1: South Oxfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy Sub-areas



Assessment Summary

2. Over the last decade, hockey has seen an increase of junior players taking up the sport and an overall increase in the number of players within the club environment. This increase has been continuing across all age groups with the success at the London 2012 Olympics, Rio Olympics and the home Women's World Cup in 2018.¹
3. Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) provide a secure and high-quality surface on which to play hockey used for both matches and training (and also football (for training and social games), and rugby where they meet the World Cup 22

¹ Based on information supplied by England Hockey

standard²). England Hockey categorises AGPs into four types³ with sand dressed and sand based the most commonly available and water-based surfaces found largely at elite centres. Hockey matches are typically played over a weekend with adult teams playing on Saturdays and junior teams on Sundays. Training usually takes place on weekday evenings although some junior training can be held on Sundays.

4. For football, the popularity of AGPs has increased in recent decades; while 3G is the preferred surface, training and informal / casual play still takes place on sand pitches which can have an impact on availability of pitches for some hockey clubs. This is the case in South Oxfordshire, where football teams are using some time on some of the sand based AGPs used by hockey clubs to train and for small-sided informal / casual play. This use can place some pressure on the supply available for hockey club training on weekday evenings, in particular.
5. There are currently 3 full-size sports-lit pitches with capability of hosting hockey matches and / or training in South Oxfordshire, at Wallingford Sports Park, Lord Williams' Academy (Thame Leisure Centre) and Jubilee Park (Henley). All have secure community use. All have secure community use apart from the pitch at Lord Williams' Academy. These are the home grounds of Wallingford Hockey Club, Thame Hockey Club and Henley Hockey Club, and are located in the West, East and South sub-areas respectively. The sports-lit full-size pitch at Wallingford School does not have full community use, and neither does the less than full-size pitch (not sports-lit) at Cranford House School (Wallingford), but both have been used historically by Wallingford HC when demand has dictated the need to do so. There are other sand based pitches which are available for community use, but which are small, at White's Field (Chinnor), Shiplake College (Henley) and The Oratory Preparatory School (near Reading), and 6 others not available for community use.
6. It is also worth noting most of these other pitches with no community use at the current time (and their size), should they become options in the future to increase supply / capacity through negotiation with the owners and should they

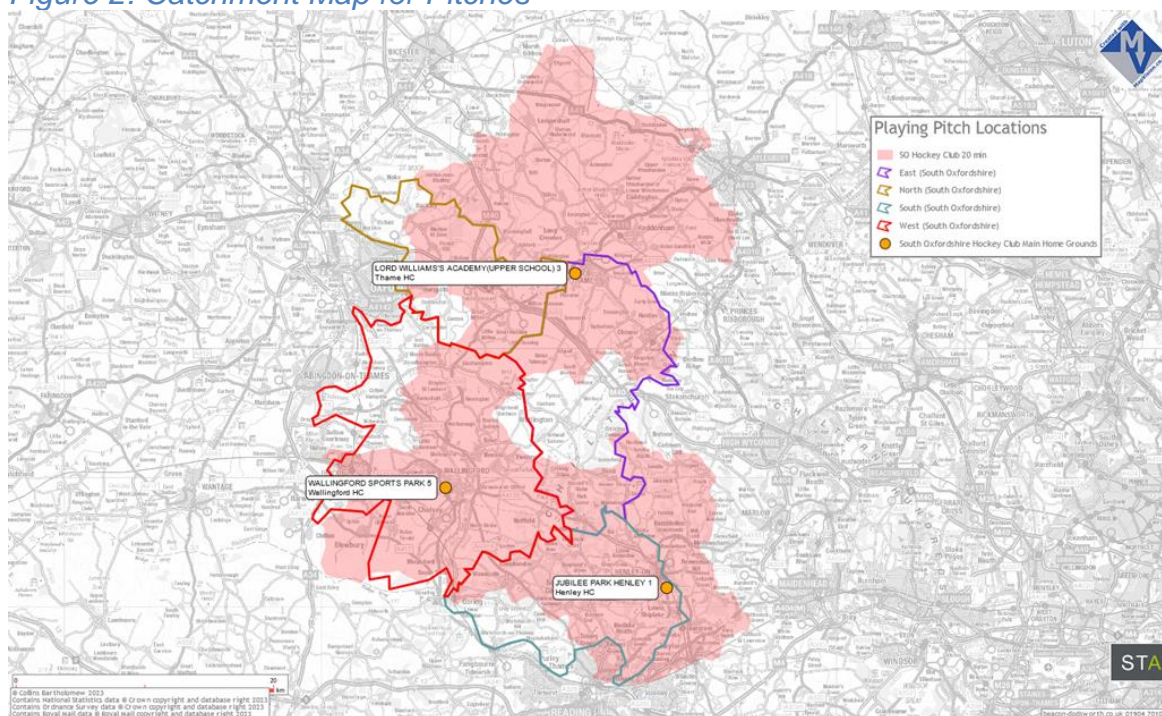
² World Cup 22 relates to the standard required of artificial turf for rugby. See http://www.irb.com/mm/document/lawsregs/regulations/04/21/57/42157_pdf.pdf for the full regulation.

³ England Hockey category 1 water surface essential for international hockey, category 2 sand dressed surfaces essential for domestic national premier competition and higher levels of player pathway, category 3 sand-based surfaces essential for all adult and junior club training and league hockey, EH provided competitions for clubs and schools and intermediate or advanced school hockey, and category 4 all long pile 3G surfaces only desirable for play where categories 1 – 3 are absent. Further details are available in the following documents: http://www.englandhockey.co.uk/core/core_picker/download.asp?id=17206&filetitle=EH+Artificial+Grass+Policy+2018&log_stat=true and section 6 of the following document regarding length of fibres - http://www.englandhockey.co.uk/core/core_picker/download.asp?id=17290&filetitle=EH+AGP+Guidance&log_stat=true

offer a suitable location at the right time when HCs need to use them. The pitches at Langtree School (Reading) and Nettlebed School (Nettlebed) are small and are all sports-lit, while the pitch at Rupert House School (Henley) is small but not sports-lit. These are all likely to be too small and too distant from existing club bases for them to play a long-term role in providing capacity for clubs. The 2 small sports-lit pitches at Oxford Brookes Wheatley will likely be lost to housing development and therefore not be available. The pitch at HMP Huntercombe will not be accessible.

7. Comparing current supply and demand on the clubs' home pitches, combined with use by football and / or other uses, there is some headroom capacity at both Lord Williams' and the Jubilee Park pitches used by hockey clubs. However, this is notional capacity only, as the hours and / or day of availability may not suit the needs of clubs or their teams and some of the headroom capacity could be used for football training or casual use. At Lord Williams' pitch, Thame HC use around 10 hours of the 18 available on weekday evenings, while they can use additional time at the weekends for matches by arrangement with the school. At Jubilee Park, Henley HC share evening use with football, with the club using around 10.5 hours on weekday evenings and football using 11.5 hours. At the weekend, Henley HC use between 9 and 10 hours, with no use of the pitch by football. At Wallingford Sports Park, there is no headroom capacity available for the club to use, with around 12 hours used during weekday evenings and football using the other 16 hours available. The HC uses most daytime weekend time for matches.
8. Across the area, some other types of demand (unmet or latent) have been identified by Henley HC, Thame HC and Wallingford HC. Henley HC has stated that it loses players to other clubs, particularly junior players, because they cannot offer adequate training during the week. Thame HC has expressed a desire to have more pitch time to be able to run a junior development programme for juniors at all levels. For both of these clubs, some of this demand lost will be to clubs outside the District. Wallingford HC has identified a need for an additional 13 hours of pitch time to meet current demand (and a further 23 hours to deliver the number of additional teams the club aspires to have (2 x men's, 2 x ladies, 2 x U14, 2 x U12, U10 x 60 players and U8 x 60 players). Understanding these types of demand help to guide where future additional capacity should be apportioned and also whether any additional capacity is required over and above accommodating existing overplay and future growth arising from calculator outputs.
9. Spatially, the catchment area of full size sports-lit AGPs which are used or could be used for hockey (based on a 20-minute peak drive-time) is shown below. There is reasonably good coverage of the district, while the gap in spatial catchment in the West sub-area is likely to be filled by provision in Abingdon in Vale of the White Horse.

Figure 2: Catchment Map for Pitches



10. While 2 AGPs used by clubs have secure community use (Wallingford Sports Park and Jubilee Park, Henley), Lord Williams’s pitch is considered as having unsecure community use as an education site, with the school in control of who uses the pitches. There is therefore a risk to certainty and security of long-term use for hockey at this site. This risk can be increased when a surface needs replacing, with commercial decisions sometimes leading to replacement with a 3G surface which is unsuitable for hockey.⁴ This position will need monitoring, security of use achieved if possible and relationships with the school very carefully maintained to help ensure that the HC continues to have a home ground into the future.
11. Ancillary facilities such as changing rooms and clubhouses seem to be in “standard” condition. Issues have not been raised or identified by clubs or providers in relation to changing facilities not being generally able to accommodate people who do not identify as male or female or are transitioning, by adapting existing provision as necessary. It is a recognised challenge, financially, to be able to retrofit gender neutral or unisex provision into older facilities (although this does not mean that it should not be addressed), but there will be opportunities in particular, moving forward, for new facilities to be able to accommodate fully provision needed across all genders.

⁴ England Hockey has suggested that due to the loss of hockey compliant surfaces to 3G replacement, in some areas in England, hockey players are travelling over 30 minutes to get to a suitable AGP (in some cases this is doubling the travel time). Additionally, because of the conversion to 3G surfaces some local authority areas no longer have hockey teams playing within their boundary and they have been displaced to different areas or had to disband altogether.

12. The Sport England Playing Pitch Calculator (endorsed by England Hockey) has been used to project potential demand forward to 2041 based on population projections and estimates of change in participation rates agreed with England Hockey. Results have suggested an additional capacity required of around 2 full size sports-lit hockey compliant pitches.
13. However, this does not necessarily mean that additional physical pitch space must be provided. Accommodating this projected capacity need should be catered for within existing headroom capacity first, if it is available, through improvements to existing pitches where necessary, accessing existing sand based AGP pitches if feasible, and consideration of the balance between hockey and football use on club sites where a hockey club is likely to grow beyond available headroom capacity at its home ground, prior to capital investment in what could amount to a new full size pitch if demand is rounded up.

Strategic Housing Allocation Sites

14. In addition to using the playing pitch calculator to project potential future additional demand for each sub-area, the calculator has also been used to project potential demand which arises just from the strategic housing allocations where the PPS can still have an influence on provision (some allocations already have agreements in place for provision of pitches which the assessment and strategy include as “pipeline” commitments to additional supply).

Oxford Brookes (Wheatley Campus) (c.500 dwellings, approx. 1,200 population) – North Sub-area

15. The calculator works on the basis of entering existing demand in terms of the number of teams at clubs. In the north sub-area there are no clubs and so the results from the calculator will be 0 (zero). However, if a pro-rata figure is applied based on the projection for other allocation sites where there is some baseline demand, demand arising from the Wheatley proposed scale of development is likely to be only 0.05 of a full-size pitch (i.e. negligible) and represents a level of demand likely to be accommodated on existing or future provision without a need for additional supply to fulfil such a small level of demand.

Berinsfield (c.1,700 dwellings) (c.4,080 population) – West Sub-area

16. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the Berinsfield allocation will generate demand for around 0.19 of a full-size AGP to accommodate hockey. Provision of one-fifth of a hockey AGP to accommodate this demand is not likely to be viable or sustainable into the future. Demand arising from this site will probably be best dealt with by ensuring that contributions are captured to invest in the existing sites used by hockey clubs, with the location of spend discussed with England Hockey at the time of negotiation.
17. Even if the projected demand from the proposed development at Culham Science Centre is added to the Berinsfield demand, it will still not be sufficient

to make a full-size pitch viable in this part of the district. However, consideration of provision of an AGP at a school site, if a school is proposed on either the Berinsfield or Culham sites, could help make a full-size pitch viable in this part of the district, particularly if it can serve other sports through a Gen2 surface which can also host netball and tennis. Notwithstanding this, however, the practicalities of establishing a new hockey club in this location would need to be fully thought through before a decision is taken on the appropriateness of providing an AGP which can host hockey in either location. It should not be automatically assumed that the total demand for hockey arising from the developments would demonstrate sufficient use to ensure that a sink fund can be established from funds generated from community use to guarantee that an AGP would be viable and sustainable in the long-term. If a new full-size AGP is not dependent on community use to ensure its long-term financial viability, it could be appropriate to provide one on a school site. It should also be noted that provision of a small AGP which can accommodate hockey play would not ensure that a small pitch in either location would be used outside of school hours. England Hockey does not support provision of small (less than full-sized) AGPs for club use as even junior teams use full-size pitches for matches and less than full-sized pitches can only support some, not all, training needs of a club.

Culham Science Centre (c.3,500 dwellings, approx. 8,400 population) – West Sub-area

18. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the Culham allocation will generate demand for around 0.39 of a full-size AGP to accommodate hockey. Provision of two-fifths of a hockey AGP to accommodate this demand is not likely to be viable or sustainable into the future. Demand arising from this site will probably be best dealt with by ensuring that contributions are captured to invest in the existing sites used by hockey clubs.

19. Even if the projected demand from the proposed development at Berinsfield is added to the Culham demand, it will still not be sufficient to make a full-size pitch viable in this part of the district. However, consideration of provision of an AGP at a school site, if a school is proposed on either the Berinsfield or Culham sites, could help make a full-size pitch viable in this part of the district, particularly if it can serve other sports through a Gen2 surface which can also host netball and tennis. Notwithstanding this, however, the practicalities of establishing a new hockey club in this location would need to be fully thought through before a decision is taken on the appropriateness of providing an AGP which can host hockey in either location. It should not be automatically assumed that the total demand for hockey arising from the developments would demonstrate sufficient use to ensure that a sink fund can be established from funds generated from community use to guarantee that an AGP would be viable and sustainable in the long-term. If a new full-size AGP is not dependent on community use to ensure its long-term financial viability, it could be appropriate to provide one on a school site. It should also be noted that provision of a small AGP which can accommodate hockey play would not ensure that a small pitch in either location would be used outside of school hours. England Hockey does not support provision of small (less than full-sized) AGPs for club use as even junior teams use full-size pitches for

matches and less than full-sized pitches can only support some, not all, training needs of a club.

Grenoble Road (c.3,000 dwellings, approx. 7,200 population) – West Sub-area

20. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the Grenoble Road allocation will generate demand for around 0.33 of a full-size AGP to accommodate hockey. Provision of one-third of a hockey AGP to accommodate this demand is not likely to be viable or sustainable into the future. Demand arising from this site will probably be best dealt with by ensuring that contributions are captured to invest in the existing sites used by hockey clubs. It is logical that contributions from this site are channelled to Abingdon HC at Tilsley Park, with travel likely to be as quick or quicker to get to the northern Abingdon as to club grounds in Oxford city located at the north of Oxford (Oxford Hawks HC in Cuttleslowe) and in Headington (Oxford City HC at the Oxford Brookes Sports site), although discussion with Oxford CC and EH will be necessary to understand whether a proportion of contributions should be steered towards clubs in Oxford city if demand arising from the development can be demonstrated to be absorbed by those city based clubs.

21. Consideration of provision of an AGP at a school site, if a school is proposed as part of this development, could help make a full-size pitch viable in this part of the district, particularly if it can serve other sports through a Gen2 surface which can also host netball and tennis. Notwithstanding this, however, the practicalities of establishing a new hockey club in this location would need to be fully thought through before a decision is taken on the appropriateness of providing an AGP which can host hockey in either location. It should not be automatically assumed that the total demand for hockey arising from the developments would demonstrate sufficient use to ensure that a sink fund can be established from funds generated from community use to guarantee that an AGP would be viable and sustainable in the long-term. If a new full-size AGP is not dependent on community use to ensure its long-term financial viability, it could be appropriate to provide one on a school site. It should also be noted that provision of a small AGP which can accommodate hockey play would not ensure that a small pitch in either location would be used outside of school hours. England Hockey does not support provision of small (less than full-sized) AGPs for club use as even junior teams use full-size pitches for matches and less than full-sized pitches can only support some, not all, training needs of a club.

Northfield (c.1,800 dwellings, approx. 4,320 population) – West Sub-area

22. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the Northfield allocation will generate demand for around 0.2 of a full-size AGP to accommodate hockey. Provision of one-fifth of a hockey AGP to accommodate this demand is not likely to be viable or sustainable into the future. Demand arising from this site will probably be best dealt with by ensuring that contributions are captured to invest in the existing sites used by hockey clubs. It is logical that contributions from this site are channelled to Abingdon HC at Tilsley Park, with travel likely to be as quick or quicker to get to the northern Abingdon as to club grounds in Oxford city located at the north of Oxford (Oxford Hawks HC in Cuttleslowe) and in Headington (Oxford City

HC at the Oxford Brookes Sports site), although discussion with Oxford CC and EH will be necessary to understand whether a proportion of contributions should be steered towards clubs in Oxford city if demand arising from the development can be demonstrated to be absorbed by those city based clubs.

23. Consideration of provision of an AGP at a school site, if a school is proposed as part of this development, could help make a full-size pitch viable in this part of the district, particularly if it can serve other sports through a Gen2 surface which can also host netball and tennis. Notwithstanding this, however, the practicalities of establishing a new hockey club in this location would need to be fully thought through before a decision is taken on the appropriateness of providing an AGP which can host hockey in either location. It should not be automatically assumed that the total demand for hockey arising from the developments would demonstrate sufficient use to ensure that a sink fund can be established from funds generated from community use to guarantee that an AGP would be viable and sustainable in the long-term. If a new full-size AGP is not dependent on community use to ensure its long-term financial viability, it could be appropriate to provide one on a school site. It should also be noted that provision of a small AGP which can accommodate hockey play would not ensure that a small pitch in either location would be used outside of school hours. England Hockey does not support provision of small (less than full-sized) AGPs for club use as even junior teams use full-size pitches for matches and less than full-sized pitches can only support some, not all, training needs of a club.

Chalgrove Airfield⁵ (c.3,000 dwellings, approx. 7,200 population) – West Sub-area

24. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the Chalgrove Airfield allocation will generate demand for around 0.33 of a full-size AGP to accommodate hockey. Provision of one-third of a hockey AGP to accommodate this demand is not likely to be viable or sustainable into the future. Demand arising from this site will probably be best dealt with by ensuring that contributions are captured to invest in the existing sites used by hockey clubs, for example, at one or both in closest proximity to the site, at Wallingford (Sports Park) or Abingdon (Tilsley Park).

⁵ The adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 allocates Land at Chalgrove Airfield for 3,000 homes. As of January 2024, there is no live planning application for this site. The emerging Joint Local Plan proposes to de-allocate this site for residential development. However, for the purposes of this strategy we have assessed the need generated by this allocation as it currently forms part of the development plan, and may be needed if the council receives a planning application on this site prior to the adoption of the Joint Local Plan. If the Joint Local Plan is adopted on the basis of removing the allocation, and no planning permission is in place, then the requirements for Chalgrove Airfield will not be implemented.

Summarising Provision

25. To summarise provision now and in the future, four scenarios are set out below.

Standard Scenario – continuing hockey use on sand, water and Gen2 artificial surfaces

26. The summary picture for supply and demand, now and in the future is as follows.

Hockey Supply / Demand Snapshot (unsecure and secure community use combined)						
Clubs	Teams	Home (and sub-area)	Club use (hours)	Headroom capacity (hours) ⁶	Pitch calculator future additional demand	
Thame HC	Women	4	Lord Williams' Academy (East)	11 weekend	7 (weekday evening)	East sub-area 0.42 pitches / 6.69 hours (1.1 adult matches, 1.13 junior matches, 3.31 adult training, 1.15 junior training)
	Men	4		10 weekday		
	Juniors	8		evenings		
<p>While the pitch is available for a total of 28 hours in the peak period, additional time at the weekends is available on arrangement. Of the 18 hours available during the week, the club uses 10 of those, enabling the projected increase of almost 4.5 hours for training to be accommodated. There is no competition of use by football and so if additional time is required in the evenings to accommodate growth projected this could be accommodated. As the pitch is on a school site, securing community use would provide additional certainty for the club.</p>						
Henley HC	Women	3	Jubilee Park (South)	9.25 weekend	6 (weekend)	South sub-area 0.01 pitches / 0.27 hours (0.06 adult matches, 0.03 junior matches, 0.17 adult training, 0.01 junior training)
	Men	6		10.5 weekday		
	Juniors	10		evenings		
<p>The Henley HC pitch currently sees around 11.5 hours used for football on weekday evenings. For the hockey club to accommodate growth projected and see an increase in teams from existing population, it would help to free some of the time used by football. The delivery of a 3G pitch in Henley would help enable this transition. However, while additional growth for matches could be accommodated by current unused capacity, as projected by the calculator, figures suggest that even a small increase in demand for training could not be accommodated based on current demand. Levels of demand should be monitored after football demand has moved to a new 3G to ensure that hockey needs are being accommodated. Some additional pitch capacity could be necessary later in the strategy period to 2041 to accommodate growth. This cannot be accommodated on a small AGP as England Hockey does not support provision of small (less than full-sized) AGPs for club use. It will be important, therefore, that if additional supply is required, viability of an additional new full-size pitch is fully tested and assured. A Gen2 or alternative surface which can accommodate more</p>						

⁶ notional capacity only, as the hours of availability may not suit the needs of clubs or their teams and some of the headroom capacity could be used for football training or casual use. Hockey clubs also typically do not start weekday evening training until 6pm, while the peak period across the district starts at 5pm on weekdays. So, clubs cannot make use of the 5-6pm hour on weekday evenings if the slot is available, this reduces the evening headroom capacity across the pitches by an hour each weekday evening.

sports than just hockey could provide a solution. While the pitch has secure community use, as it is in the ownership of the Town Council, the club does not have a lease for the pitch, but hires on an annual basis. The club has a good relationship with the Town Council, but the club should be supported to ensure that they can remain on the site in the long-term.						
Wallingford HC	Women	5	Wallingford Sport Park (West)	16 weekend 12 weekday evenings	0	West sub-area 1.64 pitches / 17.83 hours (2.37 adult matches, 4.58 junior matches, 7.1 adult training, 3.78 junior training)
<p>With no available capacity to use on the current pitch, there is no room for the club to grow. Additional demand is very likely, based on calculator projections. For the club to see organic growth from an increase in participation and also accommodate additional new emerging demand to 2041, additional capacity will be necessary. While the club has used other (education) sites as an overspill at times in recent years, these are unlikely to present a clear and secure solution unless secure community use can be obtained and good relationships developed and maintained. Such arrangements also need effective monitoring and enforcement, which has not proved to be effective in recent years in many parts of the country. A preferred solution is likely to be a two stage process, with provision of a new 3G pitch on the site to enable football use to migrate and free-up capacity on the sand AGP for the hockey club in the first instance, and additional capacity provided for the club on a new full-size sports-lit sand or Gen2 surface on-site or at an alternative home location for the club (rather than a split site). Wallingford is the preferred location for an additional pitch with no club in Didcot. The Wallingford Sports Trust is known to be actively seeking solutions on the site which meet the needs of all clubs which use it as their home, all of which are growing their membership and numbers of teams. From calculator projections, it seems likely that further capacity beyond an additional pitch will be required to 2041, perhaps a half size pitch for training. However, this capacity might be better provided in response to demand arising from growth in the Culham – Berinsfield – Abingdon corridor, in the Abingdon area in Vale of the White Horse. A review of potential additional demand in around 2030 would be prudent to best understand where emerging demand is most likely to emerge beyond the additional full-size pitch.</p>						
Projected additional demand⁷ across District to 2041			Hours (training & matches)		25 hours (10.6 adult training, 4.9 junior training, 3.5 adult matches, 5.7 junior matches)	
			Pitches (full size, sports-lit)		2.1 pitches	

⁷ it is important to note that figures for future demand should not be read or relied upon in isolation outside of the context provided by the strategy recommendations in relation to each sub-area and club site.

27. Levels of actual and short and medium-term demand will need to be closely monitored to understand how real demand changes and emerges “on the ground” during the lifetime of the strategy. A “plan, deliver, monitor, manage” approach should therefore be taken to the provision of additional capacity.

Scenario A - No education sites in supply

28. Lord Williams’ School sand AGP (full size) with 28 hours of available supply would be lost, with 21 hours currently used by Thame HC, without which the club would not have a home ground to use in the town, representing a significant loss and risk which should be addressed through the strategy.

Scenario B - Supply lost in areas of high deprivation

29. There are no AGPs used by hockey clubs located in areas of high deprivation.

Scenario C – No additional artificial pitches

30. Should a “no AGP” policy extend beyond 3G surfaces to other surface types there will be an impact on hockey which is not currently played on grass outside of school use. Competitive hockey is only played on sand based or “Gen2” surface pitches. Loss of either of these surfaces would mean that hockey cannot be played. Initial short-term impact would be on preventing growth of clubs. Some limited capacity might be available at sand based pitches not currently used by clubs, but access to these, for example at Wallingford School, is subject to schools allowing such access and without a secure community use agreement in place (and enforced) use and reliance on these sites poses a significant risk. Further critical impact would then be felt as no additional capacity could be provided for clubs to expand their number of teams. To compound the issue, provision of no further 3G pitches would mean that the current pressure felt by sand pitches to accommodate both hockey needs and informal or training activity for football would be compounded.

Decarbonisation, Sustainable Travel and Climate Change

30. When considering the decarbonisation, sustainable travel and climate change agendas, there are several ways that the sport can help to minimise impact and contribute positively towards mitigating and adapting to the changing climate.

31. For example, clubs in control of their ground and providers / owners of grounds and facilities, measures such as solar pv and heat pumps can help to secure a local supply of energy and contribute towards lowering energy costs, as can retrofitting insulation to buildings⁸.

⁸ Advice is available for clubs, for example, <https://susfootball.com/net-zero-football-club/>

32. Considering cycling and walking catchments, many parts of the district are outside of a reasonable walking and cycling distance to home grounds. Consideration should be given to how best to respond to this given that additional sand based or Gen2 AGPs provided outside of existing locations for clubs may not be desirable or viable. This may necessitate a focus largely on transport and travel options made available to the community to encourage behaviour change for players to access provision by means other than a private car. This will need a wholistic cross-cutting strategy which lies outside the ability of the PPS to fully influence or deliver. The audit of grounds used by clubs suggested that all club sites have some secure cycle parking. Improvements could be considered to help encourage modal shift from car use. However, a cultural shift away from travelling, particularly to strategic sites, by private car will take time and many people playing sports may be unwilling to make a change if solutions presented are not considered to be practical or time effective.
33. However, this type of infrastructure provision can only be part of the answer. Sports facility, pitch and ground providers, nor NGBs or the local authority alone cannot be expected to provide all solutions to deliver this type of change “on the ground”. Cultural shift is also required across sport with many players using cars to get to matches and training, and a continuing challenge is likely to be that there are not and cannot be a sufficient number of facilities, grounds and pitches provided in all locations to enable a 20 minute cycle or walk to them – it seems unlikely to be viable to provide that number for each sport. Cultural shift will be difficult to embed in many sports, also because many players will simply not have the time in their day to factor in a longer journey time to play and many will not be prepared to cycle or walk significant distances to play matches or train after playing their sport for anywhere between one and several hours (and particularly if the weather is poor and they play outside). This is not to say that this is a challenge not worth addressing, but the Playing Pitch Strategy cannot provide full answers and proposals to resolve such issues, particularly as they go beyond the remit of the strategy and will require cross-discipline, cross-department and cross-sector working within and with organisations and other stakeholders outside of sport and planning.
34. There are some environmental concerns about the use of artificial pitch surfaces for sport. This is a greater concern perhaps for football and hockey than for cricket, while rugby will use WR22 compliant 3G pitches for training and matches where demand suggests a need and play cannot be accommodated at club ground grass pitches. Concerns seem to focus around use of a synthetic pitch which is predominantly plastic, and for 3G pitches used by football and rugby, the use of rubber crumb to manage the movement of the ball and consequential loss of rubber particles off-site and into the environment and watercourses. Guidance already exists, however, about the use of infill materials on AGPs⁹.
35. At the current time, competitive play of hockey on grass is not supported by England Hockey. Therefore, no other scenarios for hockey play with use of

⁹ See <https://sapca.org.uk/guide/codes-of-practice/>

AGPs removed from future supply have been developed. If no sand or Gen2 surfaces are permitted in the future, either new additional or replacement surfaces, or an alternative surface other than grass does not come forward, at the current time, this will mean an end to club-based competitive hockey.

36. When considering benefits and perceived disbenefits of the use of AGPs, the following presents a summary.

37. Benefits / arguments for provision:

- Health and wellbeing – greater access to an all-weather surface for a greater number of users.
- “Outdoor classrooms” for schools.
- Matches can still be played during very wet winters when grass pitches are flooded.
- Rubber crumb on 3G pitches is typically made from recycled material (e.g. vehicle tyres) and the surface (carpet) is recyclable at the end of its life..
- There are other infills for use on 3G pitches, for example cork olive pips.
- Economies of scale¹⁰ – while there is a significant cost to building an AGP, for football, for example, a single full-size sports-lit 3G pitch can provide capacity equivalent to around 8-10 full size grass good quality pitches (5-6 of which would need to be sports-lit and fenced to protect quality and ensure that bookings can be honoured, with consequent costs and impact of powering more lighting and potential impact on dark skies). Good quality grass pitches would require proper management and maintenance to ensure that they remain good quality and able to accommodate the wear. If the pitches are only provided to “standard quality, additional grass pitches would be necessary, with perhaps 15 pitches equating to the provision available from a single full-size 3G pitch. For rugby, a WR22 compliant 3G sports-lit pitch provides capacity equivalent to around 6 grass pitches.
- Hockey can be played on a high-quality reliable, all-weather surface, minimising risk of injury. Competitive hockey cannot be played on a grass pitch, at the current time.
- Other sports, for example, rugby and lacrosse are played on AGPs.
- The potential impact of rubber crumb being lost and finding its way into watercourses, compared to erosion of micro-plastics and rubber from footwear, car and bike tyres, etc seems likely to be significantly small. There are measures which can be put in place through a scheme’s design and location to minimise loss. However, it is also the responsibility of users to ensure that they make use of some measures to reduce loss from the site.

¹⁰ At the current time, a new full-size sports-lit AGP costs around £1m to develop. A single full-size 11v11 grass pitch, without sports-lighting, costs around £200k. Equivalent capacity on grass pitches is likely to therefore be around double the cost of a single AGP. Maintenance of this number of grass pitches and cost of lighting is also likely to be significantly more per annum than for an AGP if the grass pitches are to be maintained to a level which can cope with likely use. Costs estimates do not include the cost of land, likely to be higher for grass equivalent pitches due to the footprint / area required.

- A “ban” on all artificial “carpets” for sport would also have an impact on non-turf wickets for cricket and could also impact some indoor sports such as indoor bowls, if the principle is adopted equitably.
- Full-size AGPs can serve a wide catchment of population. While travel to AGPs is typically by private car by most users (unless they live within a comfortable walking or cycling distance) it is the responsibility of other, not just sports clubs or pitch providers to help ensure modal shift to lower carbon forms of travel. This will be a practical challenge to many sports players given time constraints, the need to take kit and equipment with them and desire to avoid poor weather (a disincentive to cycle). Improved travel solutions (both in terms of lower carbon and frequency of public transport) is necessary to change behaviour.

38. Disbenefits / arguments made against provision

- Environmental impact at the end of the life of the carpet (surface).
- Environmental impact (in the case of 3G pitches) of infill.
- Building an AGP usually takes place on a grass pitch or greenfield site (although mitigation of loss of a playing field is usually required).
- AGPs tend to provide “strategic” provision due to the amount of use they can accommodate, their cost and catchment of users they need to be viable in the long-term. AGPs cannot usually be provided in a greater number of locations, meaning that travel to them, typically by private car, can be inevitable. Therefore, even if at much higher capital and maintenance cost, a greater number of high quality grass pitches in more locations will encourage users to cycle and walk to play sport and reduce the need to travel.

39. Work is ongoing (for example, by the AGP provider industry, Sport England and NGBs) to identify alternative materials to supplement rubber crumb use on 3G pitches, for example, using cork. Other studies are underway looking at the impact of rubber crumb and measures to mitigate its impact.

40. Clearly, for the environment, sport and health to benefit, and for solutions to be financially viable, a balance needs to be struck, as is the case throughout the planning system between provision of AGPs and resolution of adverse impact and satisfactory mitigation of these. For example, the Government has been looking at carbon assessments for developments to be brought in (which seem likely to be introduced anyway by many local authorities) and impact assessments for travel / transport and the environment already exist. Net gain for development has been introduced through the Environment Act and many Local Plans already introduced such requirements through policy. There is no reason why proposals for AGPs should not be required to demonstrate that they pass such tests. Authorities can already seek conditions on permissions including the design of schemes including multiple measures to prevent loss of rubber crumb from 3G pitches and end of surface life recycling for all AGPs. There is clearly a role for the planning system (and planning policies in particular in Local Plans) to ensure that such tests and requirements for mitigations are introduced to ensure that communities and people’s physical and mental health can still benefit from AGPs without compromising or having a net additional adverse impact on the environment. Much will need also to be done, outside of sport and the planning system, particularly if there is a future

without artificial pitches, to help make the shift required to achieve net zero and to prevent, mitigate and adapt to climate change, while also providing fully for sport and health.

Key Issues Snapshot

41. The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:
- If projected growth comes to fruition, by 2041, around 2 additional hockey pitches will be needed if other measures to improve supply and capacity are prioritised and delivered.
 - While projections indicate no growth in demand in the north sub-area, this is based on baseline data of no clubs being present at a home ground in this sub-area, and does not mean that there will be no demand from the population in that area. Demand arising from any developments in the sub-area should be accommodated by collecting off-site contributions based on Stage E discussion between the local authority and England Hockey, with contributions being channelled to improvements at the closest clubs to the proposed development site.
 - For the future long-term sustainability of hockey clubs (with regard to financial viability and maximising the availability of volunteer / coaches' time) a "one site model" is preferred by England Hockey, focusing club activity on one central site.
 - Priorities and main concerns can be summarised as:
 - the need to secure the unsecure community use pitch used by Thame HC (Lord Williams);
 - the need for additional capacity for both Wallingford and Henley HCs, with provision of 3G pitches in each location helping to free-up capacity from football use for the HCs to utilise;
 - further additional demand being accommodated in the West sub-area at Wallingford later in the strategy period with some additional capacity relating to growth in the middle of the sub-area perhaps being accommodated in Abingdon in Vale of the White Horse; and,
 - concerns about any decision by the local authority to not support AGPs in the future, with competitive hockey dependent on AGPs.

Strategy Recommendations

42. The above assessment conclusions suggest that the approach to the PPS strategy should be as follows:

PROTECT

District-wide

- H1) Protect the existing supply of pitches (and the capacity they provide) identified in the assessment (for existing known, projected and potential

additional currently unidentified future demand) unless replacement capacity is provided.

- H2) Maintain any good quality AGP surfaces and lighting to the appropriate quality standard.
- H3) Protect the capacity available for hockey use on England Hockey Category 1, 2 and 3 surfaces. Consultation should take place between providers, clubs, England Hockey, Football Association and the Football Foundation prior to any change in surface type is introduced (for example, from sand to 3G). A change of surface type (or carpet) will require planning application and applicants will have to show that there is sufficient AGP provision available for hockey within the demand catchment if the surface is changed. Advice from Sport England and England Hockey should be sought prior to any planning application being submitted. In the event of any proposed replacement of an AGP pitch used for hockey with a 3G pitch, to ensure protection of capacity for hockey, any replacement capacity must be provided for hockey clubs at the same site or an alternative site convenient for the club to access within the same settlement or wider sub-area if not feasible.
- H4) For the future long-term sustainability of hockey clubs (with regard to financial viability and maximising the availability of volunteer / coaches' time) a "one site model" for focusing club activity on one central site for each club should be followed.
- H5) Protect the current number of hours used by hockey in the peak period as a minimum (i.e. seek to prevent use by additional football training on pitches used for hockey).
- H6) Seek agreement between hockey (England Hockey) and football (Football Association), and with providers and clubs, about timely sole or priority use of sand based full size secure use AGPs within the context of the football assessment conclusions and recommendations.
- H7) Proposals for development which have an implication for the use of an existing pitch (such as change of land use) should take into account the recommendations of this strategy and policies of relevance in adopted Development Plans relevant to the site / pitch (i.e. Adopted Local Plans, other Development Plan Documents and Made Neighbourhood Plans).

Sub-Area Specific

South

- H8) There is sufficient demand at the current time and projected during the strategy period to 2041 to warrant protection of the sand-based surface at Jubilee Park, Henley for use by Henley HC. Existing slots used by the club should be protected for hockey use.

West

- H9) There is sufficient demand at the current time and projected during the strategy period to 2041 to warrant protection of the sand-based surface at Wallingford Sports Park for use by Wallingford HC. Existing slots used by the club should be protected for hockey use.

East

- H10) There is sufficient demand at the current time and projected during the strategy period to 2041 to warrant protection of the sand-based surface at Lord Williams' Academy, used by Thame HC. Existing slots used by the club should be protected for hockey use.

ENHANCE

District-wide

- H11) Gain formal agreement or security of use of the unsecure pitches used by clubs to provide certainty of supply for hockey.
- H12) Support proposals for improved energy efficiency and localised renewable and low carbon energy generation at facilities and grounds through measures such as LED lighting, solar pv, heat pumps and building insulation.
- H13) Work with partners and key stakeholders to improve sustainable travel options to grounds, pitches and facilities at times when players are most likely to travel to and from the sites.
- H14) Support provision of secure cycle stands and ev vehicle charge points at club and other providers' grounds and facilities to enhance provision for low carbon forms of travel.

Sub-Area Specific

South

- H15) Support Henley HC to gain a more secure agreement with Henley Town Council to retain use of the pitch in the long-term. Also support enhancements to changing facilities and protect the club's lease and use of the changing facilities, including if and when the changing room facilities are relocated.
- H16) Until a new 3G is provided at Jubilee Park, work with the club to help ensure that hockey time slots are protected for hockey use. When the new 3G is delivered, NGBs, the local authority and clubs should work with the Town Council to help ensure that football demand migrates from the sand based pitch to the 3G pitch to free-up much needed capacity for the hockey club.

West

- H17) Support the club to gain a more secure agreement with one or more of the local school sites they have previously used (e.g. Wallingford School) to accommodate overspill in demand for matches. These could play an important role moving forward, and until a 3G is delivered in Wallingford for football use to migrate to, capacity will continue to be an issue on the Sports Park site. However, this does not help with evening training due to sports-lighting restrictions at the school.

East

- H18) Gain formal agreement or security of use of the unsecure pitch at Lord Williams' Academy, used by Thame HC, to provide certainty of supply for hockey club use. Ensure that the agreement is monitored and enforced.
- H19) Seek improvements to the quality of the lighting at Lord Williams' Academy, taking the opportunity to provide low energy directional LED lighting to acceptable standards for hockey match play and training.

PROVIDE

District-wide

- H20) Where the loss of an existing pitch is unavoidable, provide replacement pitch capacity on a surface compliant for hockey use to good quality standard in a single site / location appropriate to demand to mitigate loss.
- H21) Ensure that proposals for new AGPs, and ancillary facilities, are provided outside of flood risk zones, or provision can be satisfactorily tested through the sequential and exceptions tests to mitigate satisfactorily against adverse impact and risk.
- H22) Ensure that proposals for new AGPs:
 - a. satisfy tests applied by the local authority in relation to carbon emissions, whole lifecycle of materials and requirements for net gains in biodiversity.
- H23) Ensure that the provision of any new pitches and facilities meet the most up-to-date quality design standards and dimensions supported by the NGB and Sport England and include directional energy efficient LED sports lighting with a minimum of 350 lux.
- H24) Ensure that any new facilities and other associated pitch infrastructure are provided to meet the most up-to-date Building Regulations, including, but not restricted to, those relating to accessibility. Pitches should be secure; be easily and safely accessible by cycle, foot and public transport; have secure cycle storage / parking; electric vehicle charge points; and, have sufficient car parking spaces to accommodate demand for the use of the facility and any associated shared uses and comply with the most up-to-date Highways Authority, Local Planning Authority and Sport England requirements / guidance.
- H25) Ensure that any new pitches and facilities have a sustainable long-term business and financial management plan in place to ensure long-term viability. This must include arrangements for a sinking fund to ensure that the replacement or refurbishment of the pitch surface is viable when renewal is likely to be required. Sink funds established should be monitored to ensure that collection is taking place. It should also include a management and maintenance regime appropriate for the surface and level of use agreed with the appropriate bodies (for example, the District Council, England Hockey and / or Sport England).
- H26) Ensure that all new pitches and facilities have a secure community use agreement in place for the long-term (preferably in perpetuity) for peak

period use and that the appropriate body or bodies are identified to monitor and enforce such agreements. Pitches should be available for 38 peak period hours (Mon – Thurs 5pm-10pm, Fri 5pm-7pm and Sat – Sun 9am-5pm).

- H27) The provision of additional pitches and / or facilities should be closely co-ordinated between NGBs, clubs, leagues, Sport England, the District Council, and the land owner (where the latter is not one of the aforementioned bodies).
- H28) For development detailed in the adopted Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), CIL monies could be secured towards the upgrade and management of existing strategic outdoor sports and recreation provision and creation of new provision and associated facilities (this includes playing pitches as identified in the PPS). However, it is recommended that local authority officers consider the benefits of bringing forward new and improved facilities related to development through s106 planning obligations as the most appropriate mechanism to understand and apply requirements generated for sports pitches and ancillary facilities by a given population.
- H29) Monitor closely the change in demand to map against projected demand and understand the real demand “on the ground” for additional match and training time. Additional new pitch provision, if required, should be provided only in response to demonstrable demand “on the ground”, together with a full understanding of feasibility and viability. The delivery of additional pitches should be made in a timely fashion, i.e. co-ordinated in alignment with demand, availability of supply and risk of loss of existing supply on unsecure sites. A “plan, deliver, monitor, manage” approach should therefore be taken to the provision of additional capacity.
- H30) New AGP pitches will be considered as “development” and the local authority should consider applying requirements to proposals, through planning policy, for future new AGPs, which assess impact in relation to carbon emissions from development through to the long-term use of the pitch, sports lighting and ancillary facilities, the impact of travel to and from the site and how the local authority and other partners will help to mitigate the impact of travel by private car and encourage active travel, the life of the surface and recycling at the end of its life, confirmation of maintenance regimes and viability of funding for them in the long-term to ensure longevity of the surface, and how net gains in biodiversity will be achieved.
- H31) New AGPs should be located on a managed site hosted by a provider which will: adhere to the recommendations for pitches above; and, not rely on third party management of the pitch and ancillary facilities.

Sub-Area Specific

South

- H32) Should the new proposed 3G pitch be delivered in Henley at Jubilee Park for football use, migration of football use of the existing sand based AGP will free-up capacity for Henley HC to accommodate current demand and some future provision. Some additional pitch capacity could be necessary later in the strategy period to 2041 to accommodate growth. This cannot be accommodated on a small AGP as England Hockey does not support provision of small (less than full-sized) AGPs for club use. It will be

important, therefore, that if additional supply is required, viability of an additional new full-size pitch is fully tested and assured. A Gen2 or alternative surface which can accommodate more sports than just hockey could provide a solution. Demand should be monitored “on the ground” so that a response to demand can be made if necessary on this basis.

West

- H33) Support provision of a full-size sports-lit 3G pitch on the Wallingford Sports Park site, or elsewhere, to accommodate football demand and enable migration of evening play to free-up time for the hockey club to fully use the sand based AGP.
- H34) Support provision of an additional sand based or Gen2 surface AGP on the site (or elsewhere in the town if part of a new hockey or sports hub – see below).
- H35) The local authority, NGBs, Sport England and Wallingford Sports Trust should work together on a preferred masterplan for the Sports Park site which either:
 - a. Best accommodates all of the growing clubs’ needs on the site and resolves the current parking issues for the site; or,
 - b. Finds an alternative new replacement strategic sports hub site which can accommodate growth for all clubs to 2041; or,
 - c. Finds an additional location for a sports hub in the town, consolidating two pitch sports on the existing site and providing a new home location for one or more sports on an additional site. Consideration would also need to be given with regard to where and how best to accommodate other sports on the site such as tennis and archery (also see Facilities Assessment).
- H36) Consider provision of an additional new full-size sports-lit sand based or Gen2 surface towards the latter part of the strategy period to accommodate growth by that point, if appropriate, feasible and viable. Provision must only be made subject to demand being demonstrated “on the ground” in Didcot and the logistics being in place for an existing club (for example, Abingdon or Wallingford) to run a satellite site in the town (if there is appetite and volunteer capacity), for example, for juniors residing in Didcot.

East

- H37) Work with hockey and cricket clubs in Thame to seek access to the cricket club pavilion for HC use.

North

- H38) The appropriate level of off-site contributions for hockey sought from any new developments in this sub-area should be discussed between the local authority and England Hockey, given that the playing pitch calculator can only be used based on a baseline number of teams and club members (which in this sub-area is zero). Contributions should be focused on making improvements in existing provision at the clubs most likely to receive additional players from the location of the new development.

A Note About Delivery

It is the responsibility of all signatories to the PPS and to users and providers, to act upon and deliver actions identified in the strategy. Responsibility for provision is not solely the responsibility of any one party.