

# **Playing Pitch Strategy: A Local Standard**

## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **Pitch and Playing Field:**

1. Statutory Instrument 1817 defines a playing field as ‘the whole of a site which encompasses at least one playing pitch’.
2. It defines a pitch as:

*‘a delineated area which, together with any run-off area, is of 0.4 hectares (1 acre) or more, and which is used for association football, American football, rugby, cricket, hockey, lacrosse, rounders, baseball, softball, Australian football, Gaelic football, shinty, hurling, polo or cycle polo (grass or artificial surface)’.*

3. The area of 0.4 hectares equates to the recommended minimum size of a junior football pitch, including run-off.
4. Education Guidance<sup>1</sup> defines a minimum pitch size as 0.2 hectares. In order to maintain conformity with current legislation the following definition is proposed:

‘A pitch is a grass or artificial surface which is marked out as a pitch for at least part of the year and on which a game can be played, and has a minimum size of 0.2 hectares, including run-off areas’

### **Ancillary Facilities**

5. As Sport England have emphasised the need to provide quality ancillary facilities, significant attention has been given to ascertain the quantity and quality of provision at each site, including changing rooms, pavilions, accessibility/entrances and car parking.
6. In this strategy the terms ‘changing rooms’ and ‘pavilions’ covers a wide variety of structures such as Portacabins to brick structures. The study has identified some quality issues that have been considered in the findings.

### **Pitch Accessibility**

7. It is important to define the accessibility of pitches throughout the study, as this will influence the availability of them for community use. Table 10 identifies the categories of pitches within the Borough.

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<sup>1</sup> The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for City Academies Ref: DfES 0580/2001, Annex B, paragraph 13

## INTRODUCTION

### Playing Pitch Strategy Rationale

8. The Government has expressed concern over of the increasing national loss of playing fields. As a result, this has prompted the need for the development of a local Playing Pitch Strategy to identify current and future requirements for playing fields. Developing this strategy is necessary for the following reasons:
  - a. *Corporately and Strategically:* to provide direction and priorities for pitch sports and to help deliver Government priorities such as environmental protection and social inclusion. The strategy contributes to Best Value while providing robust evidence for capital funding and helping to demonstrate the value of leisure services.
  - b. *Planning:* to provide a basis for establishing new pitch requirements and to act as a major tool in helping to protect existing pitches. It should contribute towards the wider Open Spaces Strategy in assessing and valuing all open spaces in excess of 0.1 hectares. The strategy will also help to protect playing pitches against development pressures and specifically residential proposals on land in and around urban areas.
  - c. *Operational:* to improve the efficient use of sports resources and identify areas where provision can be enhanced. Supply and demand issues can also be analysed to ensure optimum provision.
  - d. *Sports Development:* analysis will help to identify where community use of pitches is in most demand and should aim to disseminate information regarding pitch availability to the wider community, helping to unlock any latent demand.

### The Vision

9. The strategy has a five-year vision in relation to the provision and maintenance of sport pitches and ancillary facilities. This is:-

*“To protect, maintain and enhance an accessible network of playing pitch provision that meets the current and anticipated demand from all the teams based in the borough that wish to play home games, on a pitch that is of sufficient quality and with suitable ancillary facilities close by.”*

Darlington Borough Council Vision Statement, adopted from Sport England ‘Towards a Level Playing Field’

10. The strategy aims to achieve the following objectives by 2010/11:

- To ensure all playing pitches are safe and of a specific quality standard
- To ensure where possible playing pitches have suitable ancillary facilities
- To make the most efficient use of the existing playing pitch resource
- To provide a carefully quantified and documented assessment of current and future needs for playing pitches
- To use the Playing Pitch Strategy to support relevant related policies and strategies
- To improve and maintain those pitches identified as poor or lacking in ancillary facilities in the strategy findings
- To enable the development of standards of provision to ensure the adequate provision of pitches in relation to new housing developments per 1000 population
- To encourage enhanced partnership working between the Council, local education sites and teams throughout the borough to identify funding methods, improve communications and growth of sport in the borough

### **National Context**

11. The national policies on planning and protection for playing pitches focus on achieving a balance between addressing the desire to protect playing pitches and reasons for sanctioning the disposal of the whole or part of a pitch.

12. The following details various national policies that shape the current climate within which sports pitches are operating.

### **PPG17**

13. The revised PPG17 (Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation), produced in 2002, stresses the importance of local authorities undertaking assessments to produce local strategies and set local standards for open spaces and sport recreation. The document highlights the importance of sports facilities, which make a major contribution to ensuring that towns, cities and villages are places where people choose to live and residents can maintain high standards of living.

14. The PPG17 identifies the importance of planning to ensure these facilities are suitably located, attractive to users, of a high quality and are suitably managed and maintained. While existing open space is seen as an attractive site in which to allocate many new housing developments, PPG17 suggests that if pitches are sold off to developers there is a responsibility to replace the pitch in the vicinity.

15. The local Playing Pitch Strategy has the potential of not only being used to ensure the presence of adequate sports and recreational facilities but to be used as a document to be considered as part of planning processes generally.

16. PPG17 identifies the Government's 'desirable outcomes' policy objectives for open space, sport and recreation. The long-term outcomes of the PPG17 are to:
- a. Ensure that networks of accessible, high quality open spaces and sport and recreation facilities, in both urban and rural areas, which meet the needs of residents and visitors, are fit for purpose and economically and environmentally sustainable;
  - b. Create an appropriate balance between new provision and the enhancement of existing provision; and
  - c. Promote clarity and reasonable certainty for developers and landowners in relation to the requirements and expectations of local planning authorities in respect of open space and sport and recreation provision.

### **Government Policy on Sport**

17. Government policy on sport and recreation is largely promoted through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) whilst the Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) are responsible for curricular sport. There has been a conscious attempt in recent years to have greater co-ordination between these two departments in an attempt to encourage more young people into sport, and to persuade them to stay with sport once they have left school or further education.
18. In the Government's policy on sport, published in 2000<sup>2</sup>, it has been suggested that many of the proposed initiatives may have implications for the use of and demand for playing pitches. For example, the proposed strengthening of relationships between schools and local clubs may lead to greater and more imaginative use of schools playing fields.

### **Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (Formally DfEE)**

19. There has been particular concern in recent years over the disposal of education playing fields deemed to be surplus to school requirements. Section 77 of the School's Standards and Framework Act 1998, empowers the Secretary of State to protect school playing fields in England from disposal or change of use.
20. The DfEE Circular 3/99 interpreted the provisions of this section in detail<sup>3</sup> as it explains the powers contained in the act, offers guidance and describes the criteria against which the Secretary of State expects to make decisions on relevant applications from local authorities, governing bodies and foundation bodies. The circular has introduced the need for wide-spread consultation within the community (including potential sport users), before a decision can be made to dispose of all or part of a school playing field.

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<sup>2</sup> A Sporting Future for All, Department of Culture Media and Sport, April 2000

<sup>3</sup> The Protection of School Playing Fields. Circular 3/99. Department for Education and Employment (June 1999)

## Sport England Policy

21. Sport England's national policy statement on the disposal of playing fields is:

*“Sport England will oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or would prejudice the use of all or any of the playing field, or land last used as a playing field, or land allocated as use as a playing field, in an adopted or draft deposit local plan, unless in the judgement of the English Sports Council one of specific circumstances applies.*

- A. The proposed development is ancillary to the principle use of the site as a playing field or playing fields and does not affect the quantity or quality of pitches or adversely affect their use.*
- B. The proposed development affects only land incapable of informing, or forming part of a playing pitch, and doesn't result in the loss or inability to make use of any playing pitch (including the maintenance of adequate safety margins), a reduction in the size of the playing area of any pitch, or the loss of any other sporting ancillary facilities on the site.*
- C. The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor sports facility, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to out weigh the detriment caused by the loss of the playing field or playing fields.*
- D. A carefully quantified and documented assessment of current and future needs has demonstrated the satisfaction of the English Sports Council that there is an excess of playing field provision in the catchment and the site has no special significance to the interests of sport.*
- E. The playing field or playing fields that would be lost as a result of the proposed developments would be replaced by a playing field or playing fields of an equivalent or better quality, and / or of an equivalent or great quantity in a suitable location and subject to equivalent or better management arrangements, prior to commencement of development.”*

Source: Sport England guidance

## **Local Context**

22. The Borough of Darlington is located in the south of County Durham within the Tees Valley. Large rural areas extend around the perimeter of the town and share borders with Cleveland and North Yorkshire. Darlington is a compact town covering an area of approximately 198 kilometres (76 square miles) with a population of around 98,800.

## **Economic and Employment Factors**

23. Darlington comprises of various neighbourhoods where prosperity and quality of life can vary considerably, with significant pockets of deprivation. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2004) shows that 7 wards are within the 10% most deprived nationally and a further 10 are within the 25% most deprived wards nationally, housing a total of 45% of Darlington's population. The IMD also ranks Darlington as 90 out of 354 most deprived local authorities in England and Wales.
24. According to National Statistics<sup>4</sup>, during the summer of 2004, (June – August) 73.6% of the population were employed compared to the national average of 75%. According to the 2001 census, unemployment figures were at 20.7% of which 10% had never worked.

## **Lifestyles**

25. Research has shown that people living in Darlington live on average more than one year less than the national average (75 year for men and 79 years for women).<sup>5</sup>

## **Future Population**

26. Table 1 identifies the current population of Darlington per ward, and also the predicted future population of Darlington by 2011. The current population of 97,838 is expected to grow to 100,320 by 2011. At present, there is an active population of 65,442 between 6 - 55 years old who participate in one of the sports in this strategy. It is predicted that in 2011 the active population will increase to 67,214, with a 3% increase in the population falling within the sports participation ages for the four sports.
27. It also identifies current and future projections at 2011, in wards where there are known future housing developments. The projections show that there is a likely increase expected in household composition and family make-up particularly in Faverdale, Heighington and Coniscliffe, with particular growth of younger persons.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: [www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/AreaProfile2.do?tab=5](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/AreaProfile2.do?tab=5)

<sup>5</sup> Source: [www.communityhealthprofiles.info/profiles/hp2007/lo\\_res/00EH-HP2007.pdf](http://www.communityhealthprofiles.info/profiles/hp2007/lo_res/00EH-HP2007.pdf)

28. Based on the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit<sup>6</sup> (JSU) report on projected population change between 2005-2011.

- The projected percentage of children aged 0-15 per total population will decrease from 19.6% to 18.7%.
  - Of this age range the number of children aged 0-4 is projected to increase slightly from 5,800 to 5,900.
  - The number of children aged 5-15 is projected to decrease from 13,600 to 12,900.
- The projected percentage of working aged people (16-60) will decrease from 60.7% to 60%
  - The number of 16-19 year olds is projected to decrease from 4,900 to 4,600
  - The 20-44 year old age range is projected to have the most dramatic reduction with a fall from 32,400 to 31,300.
  - The number of people aged 45-60 is projected to increase from 22,900 to 24,300.
- The percentage of retired persons 60+ per total population is projected to increase from 19.7% to 21.2%.

29. The future predictions will impact on the number and type of pitches required to satisfy demand within the next six years. Research suggests that overall, a decrease in persons aged 16-60 will occur that may impact on the senior pitches required within the Darlington Borough.

**Table 1:** Population Projections - Darlington Borough Council Wards

Ward	Current Population	Future Active Population (2011)
Bank Top	3,754	3710
Central	3,611	3610
Cockerton East	5,081	5355
Cockerton West	4,180	4060
College	3,732	3885
Eastbourne	5,090	5519
Faverdale	1,516	2350
Harrowgate Hill	5,894	6060
Haughton East	4,133	4200
Haughton North	3,465	3470
Haughton West	5,513	5470
Heighington and Coniscliffe	2,953	3220
Hummersknott	3,584	3520
Hurworth	3,404	3360
Lascelles	3,518	3690
Lingfield	3,538	3670
Middleton St George	3,818	4021

<sup>6</sup> [www.teesvalley-jsu.gov.uk/reports/i&f/JSU0505.pdf](http://www.teesvalley-jsu.gov.uk/reports/i&f/JSU0505.pdf)



**Table 1** continued

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Current Population</b>	<b>Future Active Population (2011)</b>
Mowden	3,645	3710
North Road	6,054	5980
Northgate	4,421	4440
Park East	6,061	6090
Park West	3,506	3470
Pierremont	5,534	5570
Sadberge and Whessoe	1,833	1890
<b>Total</b>	<b>97838</b>	<b>100320</b>

**Note:** Current and predicted population levels in Darlington based on Census 2001 information and Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit predictions

## **METHODOLOGY**

30. The supply and demand of sports pitches was assessed using the Sport England Playing Pitch Methodology.<sup>7</sup> The Sport England methodology assesses specific requirements of individual teams. It translates the requirements into an assessment of peak demand for pitches. Sport England suggests that a study, based upon their method, can be used to develop a local standard to incorporate policy documents.

### **Analysing Pitch Supply**

31. To establish the current level of supply a series of research and consultative exercises were carried out which consisted of:

- Consultation with key stakeholders;
- Review of information held by Darlington Borough Council including;
  - An audit of pitches owned and managed by Darlington Borough Council;
  - A review of previous research carried out within key departments of Darlington Borough Council;
  - A telephone and postal survey of all education sites within the authority;
  - A telephone and postal survey to all identified Sports Clubs and teams;
  - A telephone and postal survey to all private clubs providing sports pitches within the borough; and
  - Quality and ancillary facility assessments of all pitch sites throughout the study area.

32. Professional or semi professional stadiums, pitches and training pitches are not addressed throughout the study, including the training ground used by Middlesbrough Football Club and Darlington Football Club stadium. Although it is recognised these facilities may have an impact on sports development within the community, for instance, through summer sports activities, the grounds are generally not open for public use. Including these pitches in the assessment would provide an unrealistic analysis of provision within Darlington.

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<sup>7</sup> Playing Pitch Strategy. The Sports Council, The Central Council for Physical Recreation, The National Playing Field Association 1991.

## Pitch Carrying Capacity

33. It is important to recognise the carrying capacity of each pitch. The maintenance regime, pitch quality and drainage will suggest an approximate number of hours play that could be comfortably accommodated on the pitch.
34. Table 3 has been adopted from Sport England and incorporates local knowledge to provide guidance on the recommended playtime per pitch given its drainage system. This table is only relevant to rugby and football pitches, as hockey and cricket pitches are maintained differently and will be subject to different play capacities.

**Table 3:** Quality Pitch Assessment

Pitch Type	Weekly Use per pitch (hours)	Description
Un-drained	Under 2 per senior pitch Under 3 per junior pitch <sup>8</sup> Under 4 per mini pitch	Construction cost: under £5k Annual Maintenance £5k - £7k  Maintenance may require aeration and sand dressing when conditions allow, to maximise the use of pitch.
Pipe-drained	2 – 3 per senior pitch 3 – 4.5 per junior pitch 4 – 6 per mini pitch <sup>9</sup>	Construction cost: £5k - £10k Annual Maintenance: £5K - £7K  Maintenance may require aeration and sand dressing when conditions allow, to maximise the use of pitch.
Pipe and Silt drained	3 – 6 per senior pitch 4.5 – 9 per junior pitch 6 – 12 per mini pitch	Construction cost: £20k - £30k Annual Maintenance £7k -£10k  Maintenance will require regular aeration. Top dressing with suitable sand (approx 60 – 80 tonnes per annum and possible irrigation may be necessary during periods of low rainfall.

35. For the purpose of this study it was agreed to reduce the carrying capacity for all pitches within public parks by 50%, as their primary use is as public open space and this has an impact on their quality.
36. Care has been taken to ensure that the data is accurate. However, the Sport England methodology does not consider training time on club pitches and this extra playtime significantly contributes to the wear and tear of a pitch.

<sup>8</sup> Junior and mini pitches can hold more hours of junior / mini play than senior pitches can hold senior play due to the lesser impact of younger players. Calculations demonstrate the hours of play that can occur on the pitches. However, when a range of games of all age ranges occurs on one pitch, the total play time should be compared to the amount of hours relevant to the size of the pitch e.g. where mixed games occur on senior pitches, this is compared to the carrying capacity for senior games.

<sup>9</sup> For those pitches with drainage where a programme of high maintenance exists, it is feasible that the pitch can hold an increase by up to 50% in the number of hours played.

37. Given the information in Table 3 and Appendix 1, relevant carrying capacities per pitch have been determined and can be found in Appendix 2. This shows either a shortfall or surplus of playable hours for each pitch. Appendix 2 has been used throughout the assessments to determine whether pitches in the Borough can meet the demand by comparing the carrying capacity against actual pitch usage for each pitch in the study area.
38. Cricket is less intensive and can accommodate many more games than football or rugby. This is because individual wickets can be rotated and rested as games are spread across a larger area. Furthermore, as cricket takes place in the summer months, pitches are less susceptible to pitch churn and artificial wickets can help to reduce wear and tear on pitches
39. Also, most local cricket games last no longer than an afternoon and many pitches can absorb two games per day during the summer over the weekend if the wickets are rotated. Through consultation with the clubs, the general practice for games is that junior teams play in the morning whilst senior teams play in the afternoon. For younger teams the cricket field is divided into more than one pitch with artificial wickets.
40. The cricket carrying capacity is the responsibility of local management and for this reason, attention has been paid to management practices and information gained from the team questionnaires.
41. More generally, establishing precisely how many pitches are in the study area can prove difficult for several reasons.
- The number of pitches at a given site can fluctuate over a given period of time for reasons of management and husbandry; this means that the findings of the count conducted over one season may differ from the results of a similar exercise conducted the following season.
  - Site inspections may occasionally fail to identify existing pitches because goals may only be erected on game days and markings may be poor.
  - The time that pitch site surveys are conducted will greatly influence the number of pitches identified.
  - Sometimes winter and summer sports use the same space, which needs to be taken into account especially when developing local standards.
  - Football games involving young children may use portable goals and small-sided pitches, which may be difficult to identify through site inspection. Further more, the majority of many mini football games are not played on mini pitches but on part of a larger pitch
42. The size of football pitches as stipulated by the Football Association varies according to age, with several pitches overlapping in dimensions (see Table 4 overleaf). This therefore means that in certain cases juniors can play on senior pitches, and minis can play on junior pitches. The extent to which this occurs unnecessarily also depends on how rigidly the rules are applied by football teams within Darlington (see paragraph 65). Where possible this strategy has attempted to identify where teams are unnecessarily playing on different sized pitches, and to present the consequences of this.

**Table 4:** Football Pitch Dimension as prescribed by the Football Association

Age	Pitch Dimension (yards)	
	Length	Width
U7-8	30 - 50	20 - 30
U9-10	50 - 60	30 - 40
U11-12	75 - 90	45 - 55
U13-14	80 - 100	50 - 60
U15-16	90 - 110	50 - 70
U17 -18 & seniors	100 - 130	50 - 100

### Analysing Pitch Demand

44. To establish the current demand for sports facilities and pitches, a series of research and consultative exercises were undertaken consisting of:

- A review of previous research carried out;
- Stakeholder Meeting forums;
- Assessments of teams within the study area through;
  - Governing body, County Association and League handbooks;
  - Interviews with League secretaries;
  - Booking records (where available);
  - Sports Club directories; and
  - Local knowledge.

45. Details of the ratio of home games to away games played per week and the temporal demand for sports pitches per day when analysing the pitch demand was considered in an attempt to quantify pitch demand. Football, rugby, hockey and cricket hold 0.5 home games per week, except for mini rugby where 100% of games are played at home.

46. Table 5 identifies the temporal demand per sport. It has not been possible to state which day midweek teams play as this varies between sports, for example cricket games will be held on bank holidays in the season.

**Table 5:** Temporal demand per sport in Darlington

Day	Football			Cricket		Rugby Union			Hockey	
	Senior	Junior	Mini	Senior	Junior	Senior	Junior	Mini	Senior	Junior
Saturday AM	25%	0%	0%	0%	80%	0%	100%	0%	25%	25%
Saturday PM	0%	0%	0%	85%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%
Sunday AM	70%	50%	50%	10%	10%	90%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Sunday	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%

PM										
Mid week	5%	0%	0%	5%	10%	0%	0%	0%	75%	50%

47. The study excluded demand for sports pitches generated through fully professional sport as the provision for such activity tends to be made at specialist and dedicated facilities.
48. While this study aims to address community games in the area, it was suggested that school curricular activity should be included in the assessments to accurately determine actual pitch use at these sites. In order to incorporate this into the findings the time used by school teams on these pitches is calculated and is shown as team equivalents in Appendix 3. The findings suggested that there are huge variations between schools (i.e. sports activity, classes sizes, pupil numbers etc) as Tables 6 and 7 illustrate. It is important to note that while attempts have been made where possible to gauge accurate equivalent teams, these are intended as rough guides only.
49. It is suggested that the same carrying capacity (refer to Table 6 and Table 7) should be applied. The equations will vary considerably depending on;
- Pitch quality;
  - Maintenance programme;
  - Weather;
  - Frequency and type of use; and
  - Pitch sharing provision.

**Table 6:** Example of Team Equivalents within a Senior School

**Branksome School**

760 pupils across 5 years (aged between 11 – 16) classed as junior players (as they are predominately junior)  
 5 classes per year containing 31 pupils in each  
 ½ the pupils per class are female participating in other sports activities (tennis, netball, gymnastics)  
 Therefore, 2.5 classes per year or 12.5 classes in total (year 1 – 5) will participate in rugby and football  
 Each class is 1.5 hours  
 1/2 of the 40 week school year is spent playing football and rugby in PE classes which equates to 20 school weeks  
 Each class has one PE lesson per week using the pitch

**12.5 PE classes per week x 20 weeks = 250 curricular games on the pitch per year**

**The average curricular games per week = 5**

**7.5 hours of actual playing time across the available pitch(es) per week**

**Table 7:** Example of Team Equivalents within a Junior School

**Firthmoor Primary School**

243 pupils across 4 years  
 3 classes per year containing 20 pupils in each  
 Each class participates in mixed sports for one lesson per week (for 1.5 hours each)  
 Therefore 3 classes per year x 4 years = 12 classes per week  
 1/3 of the 40 week school year is spent playing field games on the pitch which equates to 13 school weeks.

**12 PE classes per week x 13 = 156 curricular games on the pitch per year**

**The average curricular games per week = 3**

**4.5 hours of actual playing time across the available pitch(es) per week**

50. There are many cases throughout Darlington where mini and junior games are currently held on senior pitches. It is important to take consideration of the impact that these games are having on the pitch.
51. Table 8, 9 and 10 were developed to ensure that game durations are calculated according to the game type (i.e. senior, junior, mini) for football and rugby (not including any rest intervals). The will determine the impact play has on pitch quality.

**Table 8: Game Duration for Football**

Game Type	Duration (total)
Senior games	1 hour 30 mins
Junior games	1 hour
Mini games	30 minutes

**Table 9: Game duration for Rugby**

Game Type	Duration (total)
Senior games	1 hour 20 mins
Junior games	1 hour
Mini games	30 minutes

**Table 10: Game duration for Hockey**

Game Type	Duration (total)
Senior games	1 hour 10 mins

**Table 11: Pitch accessibility category**

Category (1)	Definition	Examples
<b>A1</b>	Pitches with ‘Secured community Use’ <sup>10</sup> that are always available for public use	These will largely be Council-owned facilities, and may be located on public open space. Their accessibility to the community is assured.
<b>A2</b>	Pitches with ‘Secured Community Use’ during peak times only	These pitches will include those at educational sites that have secured community use outside of school hours.
<b>A3</b>	Pitches with ‘Secured Community Use’ but only for a very limited number of clubs, teams and community groups	Such sites will include those pitches at schools with formal agreements usually for only one team or club. This group will also include those private clubs that are available for public use but only through joining that club.
<b>B</b>	Pitches used by the community but not secured	Such pitches will include those at educational sites who are available for community use but where a formal agreement does not exist, and access is granted on an ad hoc basis.

<sup>10</sup> Pitches in secured community use are pitches that are available for use by community teams and whose future use is secured the coming seasons by one or more of the following:

- A formal community use agreement;
- A leasing/management arrangement between the school and LEA requiring the pitch(es) to be available to community teams;
- A policy of community use minuted by the school or LEA, including tariff of charges;
- Minutes of the board of school governors allowing use of pitches by community teams
- Written commitment from the school to the current community team(s) using the pitch(es); and
- Where it is the intention of the school to maintain access for community teams to it pitch(es) at peak times (evenings, weekends and/or school holidays) for the next two or more years.

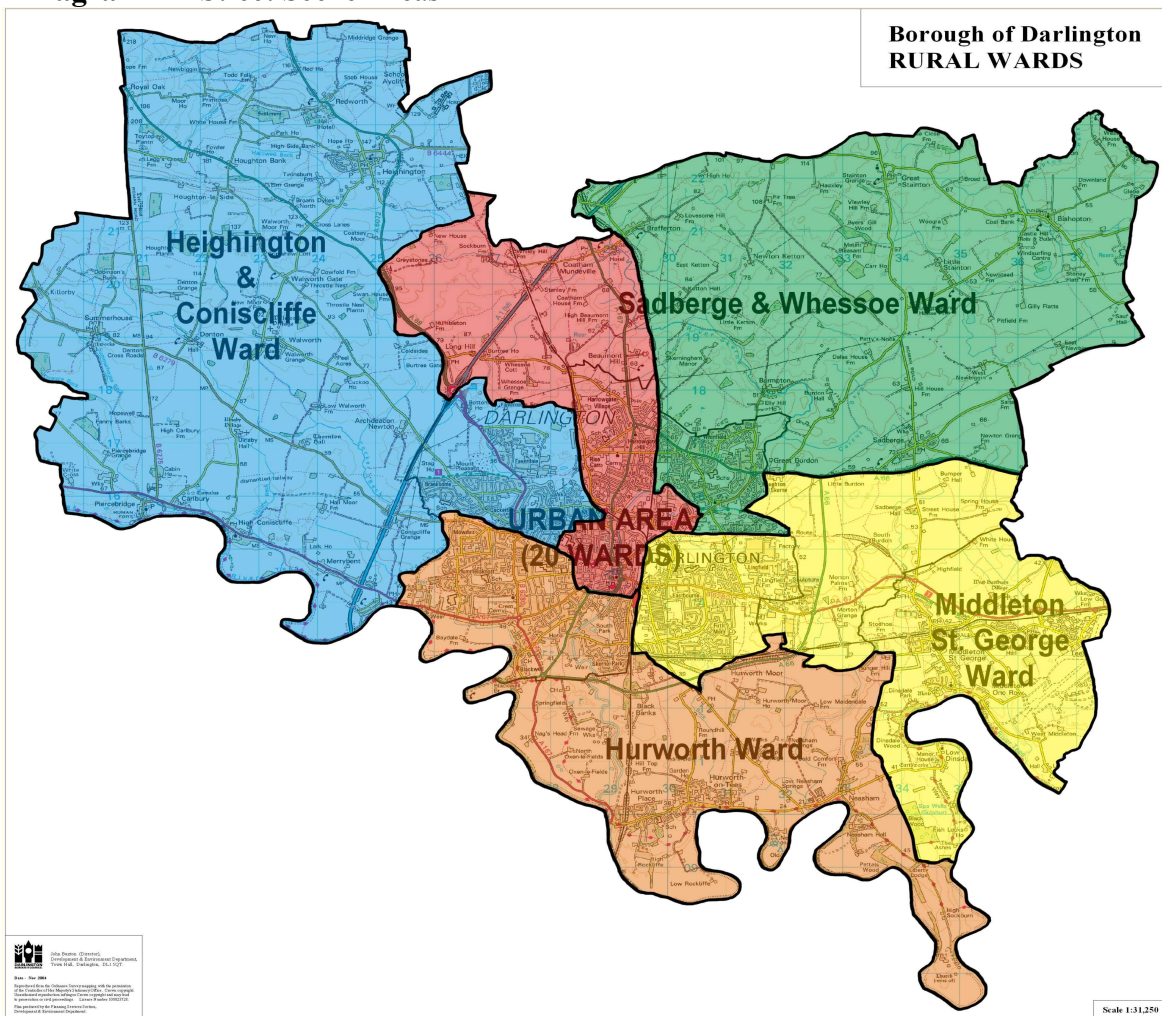
C	Not open for community use	These will include professional pitches such as football stadiums, or first league rugby pitches, which are not accessible by the public. These also include any educational sites undergoing changes during the assessments, and whose pitches were not accessible during the time of writing this strategy but who may usually be accessible for public use at other times.
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Note (1): Appendix 4 includes additional information about the categories of pitches, location and accessibility.

### Area Segmentation Approach

52. In order to carry out the assessments of pitches on an area basis, the current areas used for Street Scene and other Council Services was used as identified in Diagram 1. Incorporating both rural and urban wards into each ward area further reflects the known patterns of play per sport, and the areas about which local teams will move in order to access pitches.

**Diagram 1 – Street Scene Areas**



**Map 1: Area segmentation of Darlington Borough Council**

The map identifies the areas as follows:

- **Area 1 (blue):** Cockerton East, Cockerton West, Faverdale, Heighington and Coniscliffe, **North West** Pierremont
- **Area 2 (red):** Central, Northgate, Harrowgate Hill, North Road **Central**
- **Area 3 (orange):** College, Hummersknott, Hurworth, Mowden, Park East, Park West **South West**
- **Area 4 (yellow):** Bank Top, Eastbourne, Lascelles, Lingfield, Middleton St George **South East**
- **Area 5 (green):** Haughton East, Haughton North, Haughton West, Sadberge and Whesoe **North East**

### **Team Generation Rates (TGRs)**

53. A TGR is the ratio between the number of teams within a defined area and the total population within a given age group for that area. Identifying TGRs provides the means to:
- Compare participation in competitive football between the study area and other similar parts of the country where such studies have been undertaken; and
  - Assist modelling future demand for pitches.
54. TGRs are not without limitations; caution should be taken when using them as over-reliance can lead to an underestimate of demand if qualitative evidence is ignored. TGRs also express the current situation according to existing teams only and fail to take into consideration the needs of any 'potential' teams who cannot currently join a league due to lack of suitable home pitches.
55. TGRs further fail to differentiate between demand caused locally by teams originating within the Borough and demand generated by teams travelling into the Borough to play league games. Also, TGRs fail to project demand in areas of rapid growth and fail to recognise areas where demand is hampered due to a shortage of facilities.
56. TGRs are identified in the summaries of the Area Assessments in Appendix 5 and are compared to other area's equations. Where possible, TGRs have been calculated for each area and each sport.

### **SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR PITCHES**

57. There are 90 sports pitches throughout the Darlington Borough Council area are shown in Appendix 4. Of these, 74 are available for public use through either informal or formal access agreements. The pitches throughout Darlington are distributed between:
- 71 football,
  - 11 rugby,
  - 7 cricket
  - 1 Astroturf hockey,



58. A full assessment of pitches and sports provision in each area has been undertaken and is included in Appendix 5. Summaries of the position for each sport across all areas are provided in the following sections.

59. Table 12 identifies pitches per sport, their accessibility and type of pitch.

**Table 12:** Breakdown of pitch accessibility throughout Darlington

Category	Football			Rugby		Cricket	Hockey
	Senior	Junior	Mini	Senior	Junior	Mixed	Mixed
<b>A</b>	25	5	2	6	1	7	1
<b>B</b>	12	7	4	4	0	0	0
<b>C</b>	1	13	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	38	25	8	10	1	7	1

## Football

60. Senior football games in Darlington are played in the Darlington BJC League and the Darlington Northern Echo Sunday Invitation League. Prior to the 2005/6 Football Season, there were three leagues, however one team was disbanded due to a lack of teams within the league. The five remaining Darlington based teams were consolidated into the remaining two leagues.

61. The junior football teams play in the Teesside Junior Football Alliance, the Richmond, the District Teesside League and the Tyne Tees Girls League. The mini teams play in the Cleveland Minor League.

62. Pitch provision is distributed throughout the Borough with the largest concentration provided at education sites. There are four private clubs who have excellent pitches and a range of ancillary facilities. There are a number of council / parish operated pitches, both within parks and other open spaces, and a specially designed sports complex in Lingfield ward.

63. There are 7 pitches available throughout the parks, which are used to host home league games for teams in the borough. Concerns have been raised regarding the quality of these pitches and their ancillary facilities, as they do not meet the recommended 'average' standard.

64. The studies have identified that the majority of mini football games are not held on the dedicated mini football pitches provided. Matches are instead held on senior or junior pitches, which are sub divided using cones. Not only does this unnecessarily increase the demand for senior pitches but it is also causing unnecessary wear and tear on the pitch.

65. The total of pitch capacity versus usage throughout the study area for all accessible pitches (categories A and B) highlights the following:

- Under use of 4.95 hours on senior pitches per week
- Under use of 6.9 hours on junior pitches per week
- Under use of 11.5 hours on mini pitches per week

66. To gauge a more “realistic” figure of community pitches, calculations are also made for pitch capacity versus usage, but which excludes category A3 as these pitches are only available for select clubs. The pitch capacity equation for the borough is as follows:

- Over use of 3.92 hours on senior pitches per week
- Under use of 3 hours on junior pitches per week
- Under use of 7.6 hours mini pitches per week

67. Table 13 identifies pitch usage by area excluding category A3 pitches.

**Table 13:** Analysis of Pitch Usage in Darlington Borough Council.

Areas	Senior	Junior	Mini
Area 1	-3.5 hrs	0.35hrs	2 hrs
Area 2	3.25 hrs	0.30hrs	2.2hrs
Area 3	-3.37hrs	1hrs	0.4hrs
Area 4	-0.55hrs	0.95hrs	0
Area 5	0.25hrs	1hrs	3

68. The results of table 13 alongside findings from the consultation highlight a number of key issues within the study area.

- The findings suggest that if the current level of play remains unchanged, some level of deterioration in quality will be experienced for senior pitches in areas one, three and four.
- Through consultation it was discovered that a number of mini teams use senior pitches for games. The effect is leading to an increased demand for senior pitches. Best practice would suggest that teams should use appropriately size pitches. This would provide an additional four mini games held per week on the mini pitches in area one.
- Area 1 indicates an overuse of junior pitches whilst other areas are at capacity.
- Area 2 is the only ward that can accommodate a small increase of senior games.
- It is suggested that area 5 could accommodate more junior games and areas 1 and 2 could accommodate more mini games.
- Pitch overuse has been identified at the following sites;
  - Branksome Comprehensive School;
  - Hurworth House School;
  - Darlington Railway Athletic Club;
  - Mount Pleasant Primary;
  - Heighington C of E Primary School;
  - Gurney Pease Primary School; and
  - Durham Tees Valley Airport.

69. The study identified the majority of overuse occurs either;

- On pitches where shared usage is common across a range of ages e.g. Darlington Railway Athletic where the pitch is used for mini and senior games; or
- In education sites where school usage is high and there is reliance on a small number of pitches.

70. Whilst overuse has been identified in specific areas, there are several developments that should release some of the pressure on a number of pitches. Pitches at Middleton St George and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College have been refurbished and are available for community use. There are also new pitches at Haughton Education Village, Darlington College of Technology and the South Park.
71. The studies identified that four Darlington football teams (two senior and two junior) currently play outside of Darlington. This suggests that there is unmet demand.
72. Following conversations with the Darlington JCB League Secretary it has been identified that within each of the two senior leagues there are teams who originate from outside Darlington. The closure of one league in the previous season suggests there are other reasons for not being able to meet total demand e.g. referee shortages.
73. Table 14 shows the TGR for male Darlington Football Teams. Typically, TGRs are generated for male age group 10-44.

**Table 14:** TGR for football teams within Darlington

Total Active Population = 22,674
Total Number of Teams – 71
TGR – 1:319

**Table 15:** Comparison of TGRs for football with other study areas

Study Area	TGR for football
Daventry Town	150
Darlington Borough Council	319
Carlisle City and District	201
Redcar and Cleveland	434
Stevenage Borough Council	169
Stockton	471
Tyne and Wear	290

74. Table 15 compares the TGR to those found in other study areas. Compared with the other towns in the UK, Darlington is considered to have a slightly higher TGR, which means that it takes more people to generate one male football team between the ages of 10 – 44 years.
75. It is worthwhile noting that Darlington is renowned for sporting events such as the 10K Road Race, Race for Life, cycling and swimming events. While the TGRs appear to suggest a low participation in football within Darlington, it is important to acknowledge that the community also participate in other events.

## Rugby

76. Rugby is mainly played within three leagues in Darlington; National Division 3rd North; Northern Seconds League; and Durham F/L North Yorkshire. Mini games are held entirely within the club and do not participate within leagues.

77. Rugby is considered to be a minority sport in terms of participation in comparison to football and cricket within Darlington. Clubs tend to attract participants from a larger geographical area than other sports.
78. There are 12 rugby pitches within the study area of which 11 are available for community use. There are two rugby clubs in Darlington; Darlington Rugby Club and Mowden Park Rugby Club. These two clubs contain thirty-four teams between them ranging through minis, juniors and seniors and one women's rugby team.
79. Table 16 shows that there is current under use of rugby pitches generated through private clubs and education pitches.

**Table 16:** Borough wide rugby pitch provision

Areas	Senior	Junior
Area One	0	0
Area Two	+1.8	0
Area Three	+9.5	+1
Area Four	-0.3	0
Area Five	0	0

80. The total of pitch capacity versus usage throughout the study area for all accessible pitches (categories A and B) highlights the following:
- Under use of 11 hours on senior pitches per week
  - Under use of 1 hour on junior pitches per week
81. Mowden Park Rugby Club has two senior pitches used to hold all games and training, and Darlington Rugby Club has four senior rugby pitches used to hold all training and games. One pitch at each site must be maintained to a certain level for first team play, meaning that use is heightened on the other pitches.
82. Mini and junior rugby games are held on senior pitches and contributes towards increased wear and tear on the pitch. The findings suggested that Mowden Park currently shows a marginal overuse of its pitches. This has created issues for the club as they only have two pitches. There are plans for the club to relocate to West Park over the course of the next two years, where there will be three pitches and a third generation turf pitch for training sessions. The current site at Yiewsley Drive is to be sold prior to this occurring.
83. There are several other junior and senior rugby pitches on education sites that are not currently used by the rugby teams. Hummersknott School is occasionally used by Mowden Park in order to help with training sessions.
84. Table 17 identifies the Team Generation Ratio (TGR) for Darlington rugby teams. This shows the number of male and female persons required within the population age range 8-45 years old that are required to generate one team, based on the current numbers of rugby teams.

**Table 17:** TGR for Rugby Teams within Darlington

Total Active Population = 49914
Total Number of Teams = 34
TGR = 1:1,468

**Table 18:** Comparison of TGRs for Rugby in Other Study Areas

Study Area	TGR for rugby
Stockton on Tees	1:11904
Darlington	1:1468
Redcar and Cleveland	1:6164
Thurrock Council	1:2548

85. Table 18 compares the TGR with that of studies conducted elsewhere. Compared to other study area, Darlington's rugby participation is out performing other areas.

### Cricket

86. Cricket has been analysed throughout the strategy in a different manner from that used to analyse rugby and football. This is because the factors affecting cricket as a sport differ to those affecting other sports. The length of play for each cricket match also varies and so it is difficult to analyse hourly demand. For this reason a more qualitative approach has been taken towards assessing cricket demand and supply. This has been based upon in depth discussions and consultation with community groups.

87. It is vital that cricket pitch surfaces are of a high quality. The findings suggested that all pitches were rated as being 'good' pitches apart from the 'excellent' pitch at Darlington Cricket Club.

88. There are 7 cricket clubs in Darlington each with their own club pitch and clubhouse. The ancillary facilities ranged from 'poor' at Haughton to 'good' at Rockcliffe, Darlington and Cockerton Cricket Clubs.

89. Through consultation, all cricket clubs highlighted problems with recruiting volunteers and from accessing external funding. One club identified that informal use on the pitch had risen creating qualitative problems of increased wear and tear on pitches out of hours. This was mainly due to the poor security fencing surrounding the pitch.

90. In recent years club memberships across all clubs has steadily increased. However, most clubs identified that throughout this time they have also experienced issues recruiting younger players, as most prospective players have been drawn to Darlington Cricket Club due to the excellent facilities and pitch quality there.

91. Table 19 identifies the TGR for Darlington Cricket Teams. This generates the number of male persons within the population age range 11-55 that are required to generate one team, based on the current numbers of cricket teams.

**Table 19:** TGR for cricket teams within Darlington

Total Active Population = 28,695
Total Number of Teams = 23
TGR = 1:1,247

92. Table 20 compares this TGR with that of studies conducted elsewhere. From these findings it is suggested that the participation in cricket in Darlington is significantly lower than in other study areas.

**Table 20:** Comparison of TGRs for cricket in other study areas

Study Area	TGR for cricket
Mid Devon	271
North Devon	298
Carlisle City and District	702
Stockton	1,562
Redcar and Cleveland	629
Darlington	1,247

### Hockey

93. As with cricket, the demand and supply for hockey pitches has been analysed differently to rugby and football. The findings show that there is only pitch suitable for holding hockey games in Darlington due to the regulations requiring teams to play on artificial turf pitches. This pitch is situated at Eastbourne Complex in the Lingfield ward and is used for a variety of other sports as well.

94. The assessment highlighted that there are two hockey teams who play at Silksworth in Sunderland. Further consultation highlighted that this was due to league rules stipulating the teams had to play in this area. However those teams that did play within Darlington did express concerns over the availability of only one suitable hockey pitch, which has multi-use with other sports, and whose quality may be slowly deteriorating. In order to encourage any new teams to play in the borough this is an area that would need addressing.

**Table 21:** TGR for hockey teams within Darlington

Total Active Population = 44,937
Total Number of Teams = 4
TGR = 1:11,234

95. While a comparison of hockey TGRs in other study areas is difficult to obtain it is suggested through this study that the creation and retention of hockey teams in the Borough is considerably less than that of other areas.

### SUPPLY OF FUTURE PITCHES

96. There are numerous developments that are being pursued on Council, schools/colleges and private club sites, which will have an impact on the future supply of available pitches.

97. The Extended Schools agenda will impact upon the number of available community pitches, as schools will be required to open specific facilities to the community. It is anticipated that not all schools will be required to open sports pitches and it is unrealistic at this time to estimate

which schools and how many of the sports facilities will be available. For the purpose of this study it has been suggested that 10% of available schools within the Borough may become available for community use. Currently, there are twenty pitches that are not available for community use at education sites. Therefore, if the estimation is correct it will mean that two school pitches will be opened through the Extended Schools agenda.

98. Looking at each sport, the issues that will affect the future supply of pitches are:-

### **Football**

99. Based on current pitch capacities the following pitch capacities are calculated (not including A3 category pitches):

- Over use of 3.92 hours on senior pitches
- Under use of 3 hours on junior pitches
- Under use of 7.6 hours on mini pitches

100. Table 22 overleaf identifies the current shortfall of pitches identified above (excluding category A3), and incorporates any known future pitch developments and the future predicted pitch capacity throughout the study areas.

101. Based on the calculations in Table 22 the overall town wide predicted football pitch provision suggests the following:

- Under use of 19.58 hrs on senior pitches per week.
- Under use of 42 hrs on junior pitches per week.
- Under use of 9.6 hrs on mini pitches per week.

102. Following this there is also the possibility of two school sites opening up their playing fields for use by the public. This would most likely provide an additional two junior football pitches, which would give total junior pitch provision of 30. However this is only speculative and cannot be included as an exact figure.

**Table 22:** Predicted Provision of Shortfall or Surplus of Football Pitches Borough Wide

Ward Area	Current Shortfall / Surplus	Pitch Development	Re-balance
1	Senior -3.5hrs Junior 0.35 hrs Mini 2 hrs	N/A	Senior -3.5hrs Junior 0.35 hrs Mini 2 hrs
2	Senior 3.25 hrs Junior -0.3 hrs Mini 2.2 hrs	N/A	Senior 3.25 hrs Junior -0.3 hrs Mini 2.2 hrs
3	Senior -3.37 hrs Junior 1 hrs Mini 0.4 hrs	<b>South Park Development<sup>11</sup></b> Net gain of two junior pitches in line with it's main use for junior and senior football. <b>Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form</b> Net gain 3hrs carrying capacity due to the instalment of drainage. <b>Hummersknott</b> Net gain of one adult pitch. All pitches will also be drained (including the existing pitches: 1 mini, 1 junior and 1 adult pitch).	Senior 3.63 Junior 5.5 hrs. Mini 2.4 hrs
4	Senior -0.55 hrs Junior 0.95 hrs Mini 0	<b>Darlington College of Technology</b> Net gain of 1 senior and 1 junior pitch <b>Middleton St. George Parish Pitch</b> Re-seeding of one senior pitch to be reinstated <b>Eastbourne CofE Academy</b> Pitch configuration to change to meet demand, resulting in a net gain of one adult pitch by converting the junior pitch.	Senior 9.45 hrs Junior 2.45 hrs Mini 0
5	Senior 0.25 hrs Junior 1 hrs Mini 3	<b>Education Village</b> Total net gain of 2 junior and 1 senior pitch, plus added carrying capacity due to drainage.	Senior 10 hrs Junior 34 hrs Mini 3

## Rugby

103. There are two developments in the study area; a net gain of one senior pitch at Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College at the end of the season (equating to 2 hours additional carrying capacity) and one senior pitch when MPRC relocates to Faverdale area in 2006 (equating to 4 hours additional carrying capacity). The overall town rugby provision is predicted as follows:

- Under use of 17 hrs for senior pitches per week  
Under use of 1 hrs for junior pitches per week

104. However, as rugby is primarily focused upon the private clubs (A3 category) to gauge a realistic picture of the future status of these pitches a calculation is required to show category A3 pitches only. Taking into consideration the developments at MPRC in Faverdale and balancing this against current levels of play the following picture is given:

- Under use of 13.75 hours on senior pitches per week

<sup>11</sup> Carrying capacity equations assumes that the council will make provision to protect the pitches at South Park from dog walkers and informal play.



## Cricket and Hockey

105. There are no anticipated developments for cricket or hockey in the foreseeable future.

## Future Demand for Pitches

106. It is important to recognise that demand can change and may therefore, increase over time for a number of reasons due to:

- The influence of sport development campaigns, media exposure and new facilities upon participation.
- The influence of individual change on population
- The impact of sporting events, for example the Olympics, Commonwealth Games, The Ashes and the World Cup.

107. Future demand is generated using the Sport England Tool Kit. The current TGRs are used (which includes the population increase), a 10% increase added due to the predicted growth through sports participation. Table 23 identifies the predicted increase in teams for football, rugby, cricket and hockey throughout the Borough in 2011.

**Table 23:** Predicted Demand for Sports Borough Wide

Sports	Mini	Junior Boys	Junior girls	Senior Men	Senior Women
Football	1.5	3.6	0.5	5.8	0.1
Rugby	1.5	1.2	0.3	1.4	0.1
Cricket	N/A	1	0	1.9	0
Hockey	N/A	0	0.1	0.1	0.3

108. Using the toolkit it is possible to predict future demand for pitches in each sport as follows:-

## Future Football Demand

109. The toolkit indicates that there will be an increase of:

- a. 6 senior football teams;
- b. 4 junior teams; and
- c. 2 mini teams (rounded to the nearest team)

110. As teams play 50% of home games per week on their home pitch this will give an increased weekly play of:

- d. 4.5 hours of senior play per week
- e. 2 hours of junior play per week
- f. 0.5 hours of mini play per week

111. Taking into account all anticipated future pitch developments, once future demand has been calculated the following pitch capacities are expected:
- g. Under use by 10.58 hours for senior pitches per week
  - h. Under use by 22 hours for junior pitches per week
  - i. Under use by 9.9 hours for mini pitches per week
112. The findings suggest that predicted growth in football teams could be accommodated if all of the anticipated development is completed.
113. It is important to consider that the calculations rely upon the availability of the pitches currently being reseeded (Abbey Road, Middleton St George). However, more importantly, they also rely upon the production of excellent pitches at Haughton Education Village, the development of additional pitches at South Park and the provision of high quality pitches at Darlington College of Technology.
111. This would give little room to incorporate the impact of training upon pitches and would not allow any rotation of pitches throughout the season. All senior pitches would be at full capacity and there would be limited room for more demand growth on junior and mini pitches. There are already concerns regarding the high concentration of senior pitches at Hundens Lane, and the cancellation of matches at South Park following events. Limiting senior pitch provision at this level would further exacerbate this. Therefore it is important to ensure that all anticipated senior pitch developments are carried out.
112. To avoid pitch shortage during periods of bad weather and at peak demand, it is important to retain spare pitches that can be used as a contingency until the other sites can be used. For this reason it is recommended that the field area at one of the Beaumont Hill or Springfield Primary sites is maintained, possibly with the field holding a senior pitch. The additional senior pitch would boost senior pitch capacity to under use of 12.58 hours per week and would provide scope for relocating teams during times when other home pitches could not be used, as well as for training purposes and as a casual kick about for the local community.
113. Further to help better utilise available pitches, junior and mini teams should be relocated to appropriately sized pitches. This will allow better use of the spare capacity at senior pitches.

### **Rugby Demand**

123. The Sport England Toolkit suggests that there will be an increase of 1.5 mini teams, 1.5 junior teams and 1.5 senior teams throughout the borough by 2011. This will give an increased play of:
- 1 hours of senior play per week
  - 0.75 hours of junior play per week
  - 0.75 hours of mini play per week
124. Overall, the rugby clubs will see a combined increase of 2.5 hours play per week on senior rugby pitches.

125. In 2011, the capacity of pitches (assuming all developments that are identified in this strategy are completed) would display:
- Under use of 14.34 hours on senior pitches
126. In 2011, the growth in hourly play generated through the above teams would display:
- Under use of 11.89 hours on the senior pitches
127. In 2011, (if the development at MPRC has been completed) it is anticipated that the 2 rugby clubs would be able to accommodate the anticipated growth in team demand in the Borough. The availability of an artificial turf pitch at MPRC will provide the club with training ground to reserve one pitch solely for first team play, while not compromising the quality of the remaining two pitches.
128. As there are no Council operated rugby pitches in the area, it is assumed that there will be not be a demand for such rugby pitches.
129. If demand for informal community rugby games does increase over time there are a variety of senior and junior rugby pitches available at education sites to satisfy the demand. It is suggested that the pitches should be better publicised to ensure their availability is understood and utilised. It is thought that communication is part of a larger issue that will need to be addressed by education sites (through Extended Schools agenda) and the Council.

#### **Future Cricket Demand**

130. The Sport England Toolkit identifies growth by 1 junior boys team and 1 senior men's cricket team throughout the Borough.
132. It is envisaged the 7 cricket clubs may not be able to absorb the growth as they are nearing full capacity. Increased pitch provision would enable the clubs to encourage more players to play, while also accommodating informal growth.

#### **Future Hockey Demand**

133. The Sport England Toolkit predicted a minimal growth in future demand. The consultation found that Darlington currently accommodates 50% of the teams that originate within the borough. It is suggested that as a minimum there should be an increase in supply of hockey facilities for the current teams.

## **LOCAL STANDARDS**

135. Quantitative deficiencies arise when there is an absolute shortfall of pitches and when the existing pitches cannot accommodate demand, particularly at peak periods. Some degree of surplus capacity is an integral element of playing pitch provision because of the need to:
  - a. accommodate latent demand;
  - b. support the development / expansion of new pitch sports; and
  - c. accommodate backlogs as well as a period of rest and recovery for the pitch.
136. The findings suggest that within Darlington the pitch space for community use is adequate for Football, Cricket and Hockey at the time of writing, however, predicted future growth in these sports may result in a shortfall of playing space.
137. An objective of this study is to research and recommend appropriate standards of provision for playing pitches that will inform Council planners and investment decisions. It is strongly suggested that the Playing Pitch Strategy should be used in conjunction with the Open Spaces Strategy and subsequent standards to ensure appropriate provision is met.
138. A revised local standard should embrace provision for all community pitches. Also, if they are to be effective, the pitches must include tolerance to cater for unpredicted increases in demand. Therefore, best practice would suggest that parameters should not be set too high as this may risk wasteful over provision.
139. A consideration is that in achieving the standard of provision it may not necessarily ensure an adequate number of pitches of the right type. The size and shape of a playing field dictates, to an extent, what sports can be played. The quality of the playing surface will also influence which sports and teams can use the facilities. The existence or absence of ancillary facilities might dictate if a pitch can be used for hire or if it's value is restricted to League games. Finally the number of games a pitch can accommodate over a given period will also influence its demand.

### **The Role of “A3” Category Pitches to meet Demand**

140. The findings identify private pitches that are available on a limited basis for community teams. These facilities tend to complement council pitch sites as they provide dedicated pitches for sole use by select clubs, which also tend to be of a higher quality. The availability of these pitches is important as it has the potential to release pressure from Council and school pitches and reduces the need for the facilities to be upgraded.
141. The continued use of these pitches for dedicated teams is a factor which the council has a minimal amount of influence. Site managers have their own priorities for club development, which dictates how much, if any, community use will be allowed.

## A Local Quantity Standard for Darlington

142. The first step towards creating a local quantity standard for the provision of sports pitches is to ascertain the current level of land available as sports pitches. As each pitch may vary in the exact area contributed towards sports play, the following measurements for pitches in Table 24 have been adopted from the National Playing Field Association's guidelines.

**Table 24:** NPFA Guidelines on the Provision of Land for each Sport Pitch

Pitch Type	NPFA measure	With additional 25% allowance
Senior Football	0.90 ha	1.13 ha
Junior Football	0.82 ha	1.03 ha
Mini Football	0.35 ha	0.44 ha
Rugby Union Senior	1.26 ha	1.58 ha
Rugby Junior <sup>12</sup>	0.82ha	1.03ha
Cricket: 1 square with boundary of 46m	1.50 ha	1.88 ha
Hockey Artificial Turf Pitch	0.90ha	N/A

143. Taking these recommended guidelines into account the hectares of playing pitches in table 25 can be ascertained:

**Table 25:** Total Land Currently Dedicated Towards Sports Pitches in Darlington

Pitch type	Total Area of categories A and B	Total area including categories A, B and C
Senior Football	41.81 ha	42.94 ha
Junior Football	12.36 ha	25.75 ha
Mini Football	2.64 ha	3.52 ha
Senior Rugby	15.8 ha	15.8 ha
Junior Rugby	1.03 ha	2.06 ha
Cricket	13.16 ha	13.16 ha
Hockey	0.90 ha	0.90 ha

144. This gives a total 87.7 hectares of land dedicated towards accessible playing pitches throughout the study area, and a total 104.67 hectares of land dedicated towards playing pitches including Category C. If the level of currently accessible pitches is used, this indicates a provision of 0.9 hectares of land as playing pitches per 1000 population.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that the NPFA guidelines for the provision of junior rugby pitches do not exist as in most cases juniors play on senior pitches. However in Darlington there are a number of junior rugby pitches, and it is important to ascertain the area of this pitches. All such pitches are located in schools and for the purpose of this calculation an average measurement has been assumed that equates to that recommended for junior football teams, as in most cases this is the size that will be marked out by the school.

145. If all the anticipated developments are carried out in the Borough the land dedicated towards sports pitches will be as shown in Table 26.

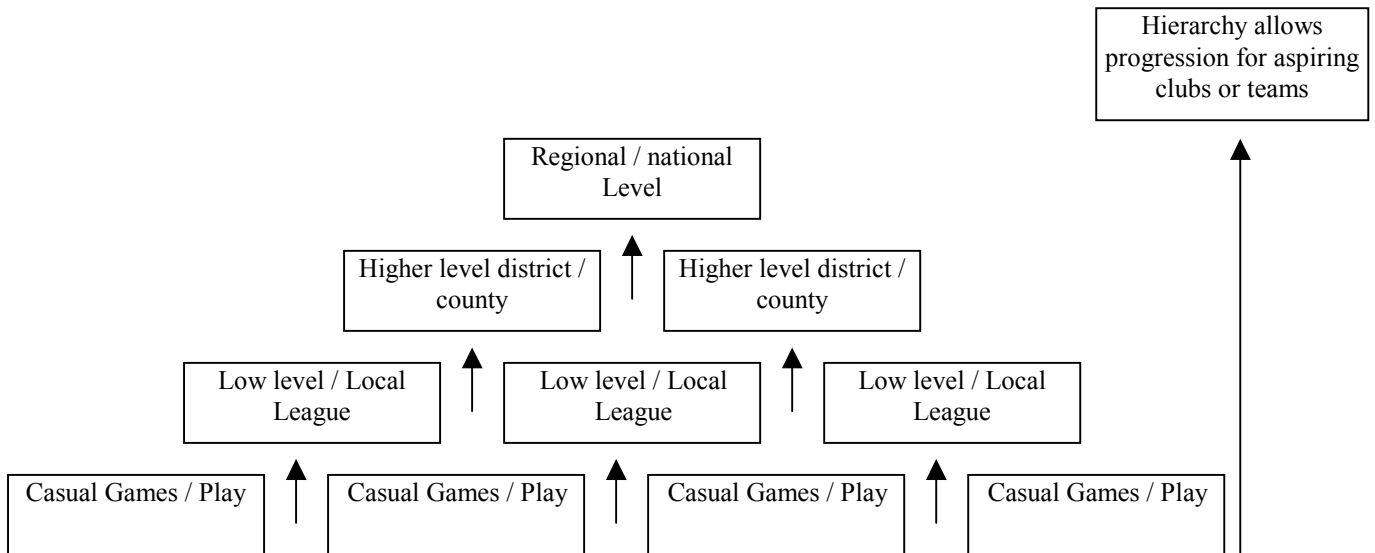
**Table 26:** Future Anticipated Land Dedicated Towards Sports Pitches in Darlington

Pitch type	Total Area of categories A and B	Total area including categories A, B and C
Senior Football	48.59 ha	49.72 ha
Junior Football	18.54 ha	31.93 ha
Mini Football	3.08ha	3.96 ha
Senior Rugby	17.38 ha	17.38 ha
Junior Rugby	1.03 ha	1.03 ha
Cricket	13.16 ha	13.16 ha
Hockey	0.90 ha	0.90 ha

146. If all developments are completed this will give a total 102.68 hectares of land dedicated towards accessible playing pitches throughout the study area and a total 118.08 hectares of land dedicated towards all playing pitches including Category C. If the number of accessible pitches is used, this will mean there will be 1.04 hectares of land as playing pitches per 1000 population. The suggested quality standard for Darlington is therefore to provide a minimum of 1.05 hectares of land as playing pitches by 2011
147. The findings also suggest that it is not simply the overall quantity of pitches that is critical to meet demand, but the quality of pitches and ancillary facilities.
148. If cost were ignored, teams would prefer to use pitches of better quality than those of a lesser standard. It is also evident that local clubs may be frustrated in their efforts to develop and improve pitches because they lack access to good quality facilities and security of tenure. This is particularly an issue for football teams in Darlington as many of the home pitches have recently been closed for re-seeding, school development or are located in parks where quality increasingly varies (especially true for Spraire Teams, teams using North Park, Springfield Park, Middleton St. George Parish Pitch and teams using Haughton Comprehensive School and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College sites).
149. The implications for the planning and management of pitches are two-fold:
- a. If Council managed pitches are to continue to be attractive, many will (specifically those in parks) require major improvement and overhaul of playing surfaces and ancillary facilities.
  - b. Aspiring clubs may require access to better facilities if they are to improve their performance and compete in higher standard leagues and cup games.

150. In terms of Council managed pitches, several teams have identified problems associated with uncontrolled access to pitches in public parks. The physical improvement of Council pitches and facilities may need to be considered in conjunction with measures to discourage public access to playing surfaces. Given that these Council pitches double up as statutory open space, it may be inappropriate to impose restrictions limiting access to players and grounds staff alone.
151. This should be especially considered for the South Park site where there is future development of five pitches and a clubhouse. Failure to provide adequate security and maintenance would again compromise the quality of these facilities over a period of time. If protecting public spaces becomes a “Darlington standard”, a robust management system should be enforced by not only the Council but also those clubs, teams and associated partners throughout the borough.
152. In terms of clubs requiring access to better facilities, there may be a benefit in developing a conceptual hierarchy to guide any future investment to improve pitches. This could address the role of public and private pitches in addition to providing facilities to support progression of play through various standards of competitive play. It is recognised that the Council is subject to considerable financial constraints limiting its ability to finance the pursuit of such a strategy. The existence of such a hierarchy may encourage funding from external funding agencies. If the Council recognises the production of such a hierarchy, it may reflect the following categorisation of and relationship between pitches.

**Diagram 2:** Generic Model of Pitch Hierarchical



Within diagram 2:

- The casual or “foundation level” of the hierarchy would include kick-about areas, five aside pitches and “rough” pitches for casual use which cannot and should not be used for competitive games, but which never the less serve to encourage participation. The allocation and continued provision of such sites would contribute greatly towards encouraging casual play, a crucial element towards enhancing the level of formal league teams within the Borough. Due to the lower quality of such site surfaces this could possibly include Council

park sites and other open space locations where goal posts have been erected.

- The local league or participation level offers facilities for those clubs on the lowest rungs of regular competitive play where there will normally be a requirement for changing accommodation and a preference for well drained playing surfaces. This is considered to be an important pitch type for Darlington as there are many teams who depend on quality pitches that are secure for league games. It is suggested that by maintaining and increasing this type of pitch would enhance football games within Darlington and encourage more formal league team participation.
- The district or county or “performance level” offers facilities for those teams which have reached a fairly high standard of play and are playing regular league games where there may be requirements in respect of playing surface, changing facilities etc. In Darlington there are few pitches of this quality as the need is relatively low.
- The Regional / national or “excellence level” represents the peak of the hierarchy and may cater for clubs in regional and national leagues at an amateur, professional and semi professional level. Once more there may be a requirement for spectator facilities, floodlighting and ancillary facilities. This level of pitch is not required in Darlington as the play is greater at low level league matches.

## **Football Standards**

154. Following the above hierarchical descriptions, it is felt important to prepare a pitch hierarchy for football pitches, as shown in Appendix 6<sup>13</sup>. This can help to prioritise future funding opportunities and will help to identify those pitches that need upgrading/improvements. This hierarchy also helps to produce some qualitative standards for Darlington.
155. From reviewing the findings shown in Appendix 6 the following conclusions can be drawn:
- Kick about areas require minimal maintenance however, they should not be neglected, as this would discourage informal play.
  - Several team’s home grounds are classified as ‘low level kick about areas’ and this may present an issue due to the quality of the pitch. Where park pitches are used for league games (South Park, North Park and Springfield Park) it is recommended further consultation is undertaken to ascertain if teams would prefer to be relocated to dedicated football pitches.
  - There are no informal kick about sites in Area 1.
  - There are no league match pitches with good ancillary facilities in Area 2.
156. The proposed quality standards for football pitches are:-

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<sup>13</sup> Appendix 6 shows all available football pitches, including those casual kick about areas that have not been included throughout the course of this strategy.



- To improve all league pitches to reach a minimum of 60% in the quality assessment.
- To have a minimum of one league pitch site with good ancillary facilities in each area.
- To have a minimum of one informal kick about site in each area.

### **Rugby Standards**

157. The proposed quality standards for rugby pitches are:-

- To work with the local clubs to encourage all rugby pitches to meet a minimum of 60% in the quality assessment.
- To provide an informal kick about rugby pitch within Darlington to support entry / informal play in the borough.

### **Cricket Standards**

158. The proposed quality standard for cricket pitches are:-

- To work with local clubs to encourage all cricket pitches meet a minimum of 60% in the quality assessment.
- Where pitches meet the minimum quality assessment, work with clubs to encourage cricket pitches to maintain their high quality level.
- Where possible, work with local clubs to help maintain the current cricket provision in the borough.

### **Proposed Hockey Standards**

159. The proposed quality standards for hockey pitches are:-

- To work with the local club to encourage the pitches to maintain 97% in the quality standard.

### **Planning for Variable Demand and Pitch Remarking**

160. Demand for pitches fluctuates over a period of time due to many factors. Given that sports pitches take a long time to plan and provide for, a sufficient quantity should be available to meet peak demand in the foreseeable future. It is evident from the study findings that there is currently an insufficient number of pitches to meet peak demand without compromising quality over a period of time.

161. In future Local Plan reviews, the Council may wish to reconsider whether it is more appropriate to seek developer contributions to improve existing pitches as well as seeking new provision according to revised and adopted local standards.

162. In planning and managing demand it would also be prudent for the Council to take into consideration changes in the comparative demand between adult and junior age groups. The Council can help to address such fluctuations through remarking of its own pitches although in practice, most junior and youth football teams play on adult sized football teams. This is considered to be less than an ideal state of affairs. Where resources allow, the Council should seek to address this issue through remarking pitches where appropriate and possible.

## **Finance and Funding**

163. The findings suggest that finance is a major obstacle to clubs achieving several of their objectives and is one of the reasons why the Council may be unable to support the clubs as much as they would hope. There are sources of external funding or grants including Land Fill Tax Credits, Lottery funding, the Football Fund and the Foundation for Sports and Arts that is available directly to clubs. Clubs also cited difficulties with securing the support of volunteers, a key element in the successful operation of any club.
164. Securing developer contributions through imposing planning obligations in cases of major residential development is an option available to the Council. Planning law clearly defines when it is suitable for councils to pursue such contributions to assist in financing new recreation facilities or upgrading existing facilities. There may be circumstances when this approach is desirable as an alternative to financing completely new facilities. This may be of great significance within Darlington where several future housing developments are proposed, and where the high competition for available land may reduce the possibility of developing new pitches.
165. However, it may be problematic to secure contributions from developers without some degree of opposition and evidence of need. This strategy will help to underline the case for such funding to be received to support the community. The availability of the quantity and quality standards above also helps to provide evidence of an appropriate future standard that can be met through such contributions. The Action Plan highlights priority key areas within the Borough that require assistance to improve facilities if finance opportunities arise.

## **Conclusion**

166. The Playing Pitch Strategy has been developed over a two-year period, supported by a Playing Pitch Strategy Steering Group. A significant amount of detailed information has been collected using the specified methodology of Sport England. This has been used to produce a detailed picture of the current provision of playing pitches in Darlington.
167. Options for consideration are detailed and need to be addressed prior to embarking upon a future programme to improve and maintain sports provision in the Borough. Once determined these will contribute towards the development of a detailed Action Plan.
168. It is the aim of this strategy that upon completion of the Action Plan, all league match pitches within the Borough will be of a minimum quality, with no sport having inadequate pitch provision.
169. The strategy has identified a minimum provision of 1.05 hectares of playing fields per 1000 population. With all anticipated future developments the Borough would have 1.04 hectares of accessible pitch provision per 1000 population. On a Borough wide basis, therefore, additional future developments need to increase this provision by a minimum of 0.99 hectares to ensure this quantity standard is met.
170. This strategy also proposes the improvement and expansion of several sites in order to ensure that the future provision of sports pitches in Darlington is sufficient to support any demand in football, rugby, cricket and hockey. A network of informal kick about areas

through to excellent pitches with on site ancillary facilities is to be examined and promoted to ensure sport at all levels of play is supported.

171. Finally, a more coordinated approach towards pitch provision can be achieved by improving communication within and between sports teams and pitch sites. A coordinated pricing structure between education sites may be key to ensuring the provision of some of the borough's best pitches at a realistic price. Anticipated developments at several such education sites promise to provide some excellent first class facilities and it is imperative that these are accessible to the Borough's sports teams.