

Playing Pitch, Outdoor and Indoor Sport Strategy

Darlington Borough Council



Strategy and Action Plan

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In May 2025, Darlington Borough Council appointed Sports Planning Consultants (SPC) to produce a Sports Facilities Strategy (SFS). This strategy updates the current strategy which was produced in 2021.
- 1.2 The primary purpose of this SFS is to provide a strategic framework for indoor and outdoor sports facilities (including playing pitches). It evaluates the adequacy of existing provision and sets out the strategic direction and site-specific priorities for the future delivery of sports facilities across the borough up to 2036. It will remain a valid document for the period 2026 – 2031.
- 1.3 It considers facility requirements for the following sports;
 - Football (grass pitches and 3G)
 - Rugby Union (grass pitches and 3G)
 - Hockey
 - Cricket
 - Tennis
 - Bowls
 - Athletics
 - Indoor built sports facilities.
- 1.4 The PPOSS is made up of two documents;
 - An Assessment Report
 - A Strategy and Action Plan.
- 1.5 This is the strategy and action plan document. It draws on the issues identified in the assessment report (under separate cover) and sets out how the Council and its partners will respond to these issues and drive improvements to ensure that supply meets demand in future years.
- 1.6 To maximise the opportunities that this PPOSS can bring, the strategy promotes collaborative working with key partners. The production of this written strategy therefore represents only the start of the process. The task of the project steering group is now to deliver the recommendations and action plan.

Strategic Vision

- 1.7 Darlington Borough has maintained an up to date SFS since 2010. Over the years, the strategy has successfully driven significant improvement and investment into the sporting infrastructure across Darlington Borough. Recent successes include;
 - Extensive improvement of grass football pitches with support from the Football Foundation Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund
 - Delivery of a second 3G AGP at Eastbourne Sports Complex in partnership with the Football Foundation
 - Refurbishment of the athletics track at Eastbourne Sports Complex
 - Creation of new playing field land at Staindrop Road
 - Improvement to clubhouse to support cricket at Rockcliffe Park
 - Ongoing upgrades to the indoor sports facilities at The Dolphin Centre
 - Significant investment into sports through S106 funding obtained from new development.
- 1.8 This strategy seeks to build on these successes and to deliver the sporting vision for the borough up to 2031.

- 1.9 The vision for the strategy therefore remains the same, specifically;

'To develop a comprehensive, robust, up to date and user friendly assessment of sports provision and need in Darlington to ensure that the right amount and type of sports facilities are protected, and where appropriate enhanced to provide a range of quality, accessible and safe facilities, in the right place at the right time to meet the needs of the community now and in future years.'

- 1.10 The strategy will directly support the achievement of the visions and key priorities within both the Darlington Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2025 – 2029) and the Darlington Physical Activity Strategy (2025 – 2035). It will ensure that the facilities that are necessary to support participation in sport and physical activity in Darlington are provided.

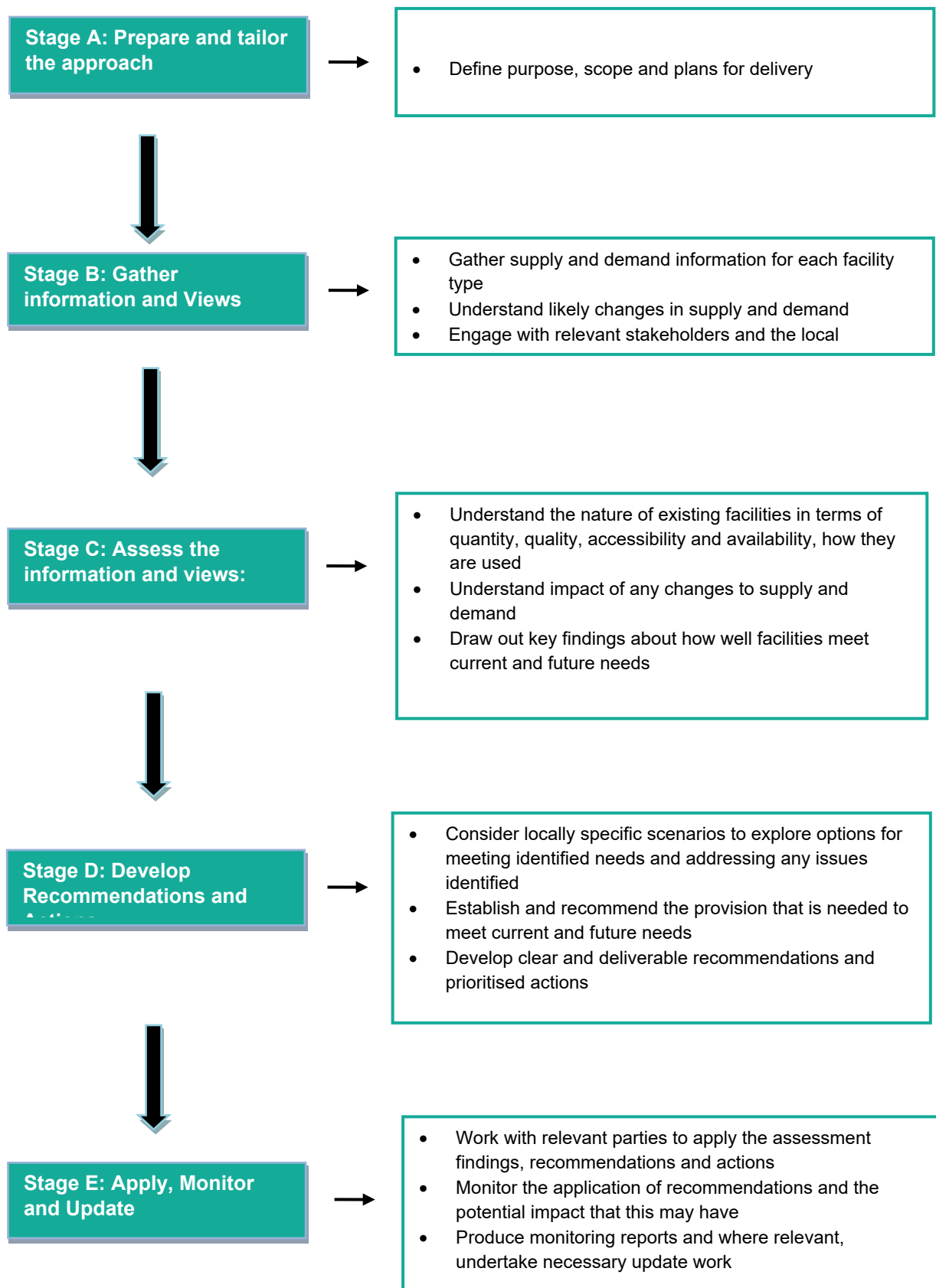
Key Drivers

- 1.11 The primary purpose of a SFS is to provide a strategic framework to ensure that the provision of indoor and outdoor sports facilities meets the needs of current and future residents of the area. The creation of such a strategy responds directly to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which evidences the importance of providing access to high quality opportunities for sport and recreation.
- 1.12 Locally in Darlington, the key drivers for updating the SFS are;
- To ensure that the document remains reflective of current needs so that the Council and key partners can continue to use it to inform decision making
 - To provide the evidence required to protect valuable existing provision and support the delivery of new facilities where they are needed
 - To provide up to date evidence to inform the review of the Darlington Local Plan and policy / decision making
 - To understand the impact of ongoing increases in participation, as well as the proposed housing on demand for playing fields and outdoor sports facilities
 - To contribute to wider local and national goals to improve health and wellbeing through participation in sport
 - To compile a new up to date action plan. This will be used to provide evidence to secure funding
 - To support internal and external funding applications and facilitate the collection of S106 contributions.

Methodology

- 1.13 This SFS has been produced in line with guidance by Sport England set out in '*Playing Pitch Guidance, An Approach to Developing and Delivering a Playing Pitch Strategy (2013) and Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guide for Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities (2014)*'.
- 1.14 Sport England are in the process of updating these documents and it is anticipated that new guidance will be released later in 2026. The new guidance will replace the two existing methodologies and will set out an overarching approach that will cover all sports.
- 1.15 Whilst the full content of the documents is not yet known, we have sought wherever possible to incorporate elements that are likely to be included within the revised guidance into the assessment of facilities within Darlington. To do this, we have received support from Sport England and relevant National Governing Bodies of Sport.
- 1.16 The new methodology sets out a five stage approach as outlined overleaf. This strategy document covers Stages D and E, whilst the assessment report (under separate cover) outlines the findings of Stages A to C.

Figure 1.1 – Approach to Strategy Development



- 1.17 For all sports, recommendations and priorities have been developed following extensive consultation, analysis and scenario testing and in conjunction with representatives of the following key organisations;
- Darlington Borough Council (DBC)
 - Durham County Football Association (DCFA) and The Football Foundation (FF)
 - The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and Durham Cricket
 - The Rugby Football Union (RFU)
 - England Hockey (EH)
 - The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA)
 - England Athletics (EA)
 - Sport England.
- 1.18 The views of these groups have been used to shape this strategy and to finalise the action and implementation plan. The consultation process does not stop here - many of the identified short-term actions will involve ongoing consultation with wider groups, ensuring that any priorities implemented are reflective of the needs and aspirations of current pitch users.
- 1.19 It should be noted that the strategy aims to capture all outdoor and built sports facilities as well as all participation across Darlington Borough. There may however be instances where a site / club is unknowingly omitted. Where sites / pitches have not been recorded they remain as sports facilities / playing fields and for planning purposes continue to be so. Furthermore, exclusion of a pitch does not mean that it is not required from a supply and demand point of view.
- 1.20 The strategy monitoring process will ensure that the document is kept up to date as any omissions / errors arise and where changes occur.

Context and Wider Links

- 1.21 The effective provision of indoor and outdoor sports facilities can contribute to the delivery of many national, regional and local targets. This strategy will provide an evidence base for decision making, but will also help to deliver on the priorities of Sport England and the relevant National Governing Bodies of Sport.
- 1.22 Sport England's strategic outcomes planning guidance emphasises this, reporting that sport and physical activity are increasingly seen as a co-producer of local outcomes. Local Authorities nationally are using their services, assets, partnerships and infrastructure to make a significant contribution to their residents' lives as a direct provider, commissioner or enabler.
- 1.23 The focus of this SFS is on facilities. Sport England states that building the right thing in the right place makes taking part in sport and physical activity a realistic option for many and leads to a better experience for those who are already engaged. The clear messages from the government and Sport England are that people need to be more active – this strategy therefore seeks to ensure that the network of facilities facilitates this and to support the delivery of high-quality facilities that are delivered in the right place to support participation.
- 1.24 Locally, the strategy will directly contribute to the delivery of a wide range of strategic priorities. As well as provide an evidence base to underpin and support the delivery of the Darlington Local Plan, the implementation of this strategy will also support the achievement of the key outcomes and priorities of the Darlington Physical Activity Strategy (2025 – 2035) and Darlington Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2025 – 2029).

- 1.25 The end goal of this strategy is to deliver the overarching vision and achieve the aims and objectives set out on the previous pages. To do this, it is essential that facilities for each sport continue to evolve and improve to meet with changing needs and aspirations.

Structure

- 1.26 The remainder of this strategy is set out as follows;
- Section 2 – Sport and facility Specific Issues and Scenario Testing
 - Section 3 – Strategic Framework and Sport Specific Recommendations
 - Section 4 - Action Plans by Sub Area, Monitoring and Review.

2.0 Sport Specific Issues

Introduction

- 2.1 This section summarises the current and projected future position for each sport across Darlington and the key issues that need to be addressed.
- 2.2 For each sport, a summary table is provided. The detail behind the headlines is provided in the supporting assessment report (May 2026).
- 2.3 To help develop the recommendations/actions and to understand their potential impact, relevant scenario questions are also tested in this section for some sports. The results of these scenarios have helped to drive the sport and site-specific recommendations.
- 2.4 Recommendations for delivering on the key issues identified on a sport by sport basis are set out in Section 3, while Section 4 contains a site specific action plan.

Cricket

Summary	Assessment Findings	Specific Facility Issues
Supply	- There are six grass cricket squares, the same position as in 2021 - All cricket grounds offer security of tenure except Haughton CC, which is leased annually from a local farmer. There is also a residential development proposed adjacent to this site. - There are almost no facilities for cricket on the school estate - There is evidence of significant investment in cricket since the 2021 SFS at all grounds. All sites are functional and quality is good at both Darlington CC and Rockcliffe Park. There remain opportunities to improve both of these sites further, but also to address quality issues at other clubs. - All clubs identify further improvement works as being required– for 50%, these focus on the pitch. Levels of maintenance input clearly correlates with pitch quality. Lack of skilled maintenance staff is an issue at 1/3 of clubs - Ancillary facilities is a priority at larger clubs, with participation growth impacted by the availability of appropriate facilities for new players, women and girls - Lack of / poor training facilities is also evident at several sites – 5/6 clubs identify training facility improvements amongst their key priorities.	- Haughton CC – upgrade to pavilion, permanent training nets required, long term lease for facility - Middleton St George CC – upgrade to existing playing fields through improved maintenance, installation of non turf practice facility - Rockcliffe Park Cricket Club – further extension to pavilion, works to improve sustainability. Turf practice facilities are a longer term aspiration - Cockerton CC – improved maintenance, drainage works and pavilion extension - Darlington CC – conversion of wickets to improve training opportunities, improvement to changing facilities and investment into clubhouses - Darlington RA – improvement of pitch maintenance (requires machinery), investment into pavilion, provision of non turf practice nets.
Demand	- Whilst adult male cricket is static, there has been significant growth in female cricket and participation in junior cricket has almost doubled. Women and girls cricket is growing exponentially - The midweek cricket league has continued to decline - Three larger clubs have strong and very sustainable junior sections.. These clubs are also engaging with ECB development programmes and are developing girls sections by engaging with ECB programmes - Larger sites are also used to support representative cricket – this adds to wear and tear on the square - All clubs run at least one weekly training session on the grass square. Cockerton CC, Haughton CC, MSG have mobile net cages, but no other training facilities and therefore there is greater reliance on the square	- Lack of junior sections at village clubs impacts on sustainability - Lack of training facilities means that demand is not met - Competition for indoor cricket nets from other sports

	- There is greater variety of training provision at other sites, but Darlington CC are looking to convert grass wickets to artificial and both other sites require further off field nets - Winter training takes place primarily in Darlington (Hurworth School, Longfield Academy, Education Village and Hummersknott), but clubs also travel to ML Sports (Richmond) and Sedgefield School (Sedgefield). Lack of availability in sports halls due to competing demands with football is identified as key issue for cricket clubs	
Adequacy of Provision	- All active grass pitches are used regularly during the cricket season - There is slight overplay at both Rockcliffe Park and Haughton Cricket Club. The overplay at Rockcliffe Park can be attributed to high levels of demand, while the overplay at Haughton CC results from a small square (and usage of the facility by friendly teams as well as the cricket clubs own two teams) - There is also a small amount of overplay at Darlington RA which arises because of increasing participation - All other sites are able to sustain more play, although there is limited scope for extensive growth at any club. Only Cockerton CC actually has any spare capacity for an additional team - There is no spare capacity on a Saturday, and pressures for pitch access are also now starting to build on Sundays with youth fixtures competing with additional male senior teams playing due to lack of spare capacity on Saturdays - The growth of women and girls cricket is further adding to the pressures that are experienced at club bases - Boroughwide, there is already no remaining spare capacity - Population growth is likely to generate demand equivalent to one additional cricket pitch (46 matches) – this level of demand cannot be met by the existing infrastructure, given the pressures that are already evident - Participation growth generated by engagement with key ECB programmes including All Stars, Dynamos and women and girls will have further impact on demand - All three larger clubs are part of the ECB women and girls development programme, and also have aspirations for junior growth. None of these growth aspirations can be met by the existing infrastructure.	- Pitch quality is impacting capacity at Darlington RA, Haughton CC, Middleton St George and Cockerton CC - There are also quality issues at other sites which impact upon player capacity and capacity to accommodate onsite training - There is no remaining spare capacity at peak time in the Borough – this limits the growth of the male game - Unmet demand is now evident across the borough as a whole - Female and junior cricket continues to grow, but appropriate ancillary facilities are required to support this.
Key Issues for Strategy to	- There is a need to support long term access to facilities – existing sites require protection and access to Haughton CC will need to be secured - There is no spare capacity in the existing pitch stock and no spare capacity at peak time - there is therefore a need to create additional capacity - The quality of pitches is impacting capacity on some sites and this needs to be addressed – these sites are Darlington RA, Haughton CC, Middleton St George and Cockerton CC	

address	• There are also quality issues at other sites which impact upon player capacity and capacity to accommodate onsite training – qualitative improvements need to be prioritised - Darlington RA, Haughton CC, Middleton St George and Cockerton CC • Training facilities are also highlighted as an issue for almost every club. Key priorities include Rockcliffe Park, Middleton St George, Haughton CC, non turf at Cockerton CC, Darlington CC • Increases in participation through engagement with ECB schemes as well as population growth is likely to generate demand for at least one additional cricket pitch – the increased demand cannot be met within the existing infrastructure
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Scenario Testing for Cricket

- 2.5 The assessment clearly demonstrated that supply for cricket in Darlington is severely constrained, with supply already unable to meet demand when looking across all sites together. Forecasting suggesting that population growth alone would generate demand for 45 additional match equivalent sessions, further exacerbating unmet demand.
- 2.6 To inform the preparation of recommendations, scenario testing was undertaken to explore the extent to which qualitative improvements at existing cricket sites could improve capacity. This is set out below.

Impact of Improving Pitch Quality on adequacy of cricket infrastructure

- 2.7 Both Darlington CC and Rockcliffe Park CC are already good quality and consequently there are no further opportunities to increase capacity at these sites. Instead, it will be important that the existing high standards are maintained.
- 2.8 Table 2.1 demonstrates the impact of improving quality to good on the other four sites. It shows that this would address the capacity issues that are experienced during the season at both sites where there are existing pressures - Haughton CC and Darlington RA, although it would not add any additional peak time capacity at any site.

Table 2.1– Impact of Improving Cricket Sites to Good

Site Name	Total Wickets Required (Club Matchplay)	Other Demand (Match Equivalents)	Total Demand	Supply / Demand Position	Peak Time Position
Darlington Railway Athletic CC	13	2	13	3	0
Cockerton CC	6	2	9	3	0
Middleton St George Cricket Club	6	6	9	3	0
Haughton Cricket Club	6	0	8	0	0

- 2.9 It is evident however that even in the event that all cricket club sites are rated as good quality, large increases in participation cannot be accommodated. This is particularly critical when considering the growth in the women and girls game, which has generated exponential increases in the number of players and teams in recent seasons.
- 2.10 The additional play by women and girls teams typically increases the use of the wicket at other times. This creates both scheduling challenges across the week and extra wear and tear. Added to this, the male game remains strong and growth also continues to be experienced.
- 2.11 Table 2.2 evaluates the growth potential that is available in the existing infrastructure, on the assumption that all pitches are of good quality.

Table 2.2– Maximum Growth Potential

Site Name	Supply / Demand Position	Additional Games that can be sustained	Maximum Growth that can be accommodated
Rockcliffe Park	-9	0	None
Darlington CC	2	10	1 team
Darlington Railway Athletic CC	3	15	2 teams
Cockerton CC	3	15	2 teams
Middleton St George Cricket Club	3	15	2 teams
Haughton Cricket Club	0	0	None

2.12 Table 2.2 demonstrates that the likely increase in demand cannot be accommodated. At the three clubs where women and girls cricket is most likely to increase (because they are running relevant programmes);

- there is already no available capacity at Rockcliffe Park
- there is scope only for 10 additional games at Darlington CC – equivalent to 1 team (or almost 2 juniors) – this is insufficient for a full girls section (particularly if an increase in demand for male cricket is also evident)
- there is scope for 2 additional teams at Darlington RA, but only on the assumption that pitch quality is improved.

Tennis

Summary	Assessment Findings	Specific Facility Issues
Supply	- Provision remains broadly consistent with 2021 – there are 45 tennis courts across the Borough, 38 of which are available for community use - Since 2021, 12 new padel courts have also been installed at Blackwell Meadows, Pure Padel and Rockcliffe Park Hotel - There are 12 floodlit courts located at New Blackwell Tennis Club (4), Longfield Academy (5) and Darlington Education Village (3) and Rockcliffe Park (1) - Quality of tennis facilities is varying, with public facilities of poor quality and school facilities standard. Club facilities are good, with courts at Wellfield Tennis Club having been resurfaced since the 2021 PPS	- Quality of public courts require improvement if drive to increase participation is to be led by these sites - Some improvements required at club bases - floodlighting
Demand	- Nationally, there have been positive increases in participation since the 2021 strategy - LTA insight highlights the importance of parks courts in providing a rounded offer for tennis, indicating that it is in parks where most people start their tennis journey. - Access to public facilities across Darlington Borough is currently free of charge and access is unmanaged and actual levels of participation are therefore unknown, although anecdotally, courts are believed to be underused. Clubs believe that the limited public facilities negatively impacts on the number of tennis players in the Borough - Levels of community bookings on school sites are also limited, although this is likely influenced by poor marketing and promotion as well as unclear booking procedures - The same two tennis clubs remain. Since the 2021 strategy, membership numbers have declined at New Blackwell, but there has been a slight increase at Wellfield.	- Increasing participation nationally, but some key barriers identified in Darlington including; - Court quality - Marketing and promotion
Adequacy of Provision	- Based upon current levels of participation, there are enough courts to accommodate potential demand. Estimated demand equates to 944, whilst there is capacity for 1266 players. - It is evident therefore that the current stock of parks and school courts are underused. Low levels of participation are potentially a direct reflection of the poor quality of the facilities, as well as the limited promotion that takes place on both public and school sites. With these two facility types typically accommodating grass roots tennis, and demand from new participants when they first try the game, addressing these issues will be essential if participation targets are to be achieved. Despite the pressures on the existing clubs, both suggest that promotion	- Darlington Education Village / Longfield Academy offer particular potential to increase usage as their courts are floodlit, which increases the playing season - LTA are able to support schools with gate access technology and online booking systems to support community use

	of opportunities for tennis across Darlington, alongside investment into the quality of parks courts, should be the key priority moving forward • Although overall there is enough capacity, this disguises the pressures at club bases - Wellfield TC has no remaining capacity and very limited remaining capacity is available at New Blackwell. Consultation with the clubs highlights that this represents the actual situation, with both identifying a need for additional capacity (ideally floodlit and covered) • Importantly, if new participants transitioned from grass roots sites (parks and schools) through to club bases, there is unlikely to be enough capacity available on club sites to accommodate these new players. • The role that schools play (and potentially the creation of satellite clubs, as well as improved capacity for existing clubs) will therefore become increasingly important • It is also noted that whilst there is enough capacity, tennis courts are primarily located in the west of the Borough, with access in the east and north much more limited. • Clubs identify that the additional capacity is required to sustain club activity. Alongside floodlighting at their home bases, access to covered / indoor provision is deemed to be essential if participation in tennis is to grow. Improving access to covered tennis courts, which facilitates year round participation, is also a priority for the LTA nationally. Darlington is identified as a priority location. • With 12 existing padel courts, analysis against LTA parameters suggests that there are now enough padel courts in Darlington to meet the needs of the current population and no clear requirement for additional facilities. The provision of further courts on Faverdale Industrial Estate would add to the existing infrastructure. • Application of the SE calculator to the assumed population growth (13,106) suggests that an additional 260 visits to tennis courts will be generated per week. This equates to 1.67 tennis courts. The existing infrastructure is able to accommodate this additional 167 players, even if maximum potential participation levels were achieved amongst the current population. The location of the existing provision (west and south) of the borough may however need to be considered in the event of significant housing growth in the north.	• Both existing clubs are at capacity. Scope to improve floodlighting (New Blackwell) or add floodlighting (Wellfield) to ensure members can be better accommodated • New indoor / covered tennis provision identified as a key priority to enhance club access
Key Issues for Strategy to address	• There is a need to protect the existing stock of courts • There is scope to increase the amount of usage of public facilities, with no proactive marketing or promotion and no monitoring of use. LTA insight also suggests that usage of public facilities increases when more structured access is provided (improving the customer journey through online resources, controlled access etc). This would require both qualitative improvements to the courts and the introduction of technological solutions to ensure that long term, residents have access to quality, sustainable provision	

	• Club bases are at capacity and there is little room for growth without compromising the player experience. There is a potential requirement for floodlighting works at both club sites • There is opportunity to tailor new programmes for tennis at school sites to increase usage of courts. The Education Village and Longfield Academy represent a particular opportunity as they have floodlit courts but improvements may be required to all school sites to improve desirability. • The capacity position at club bases means that further provision is a priority – Darlington is identified as a key location for covered / indoor tennis courts • There is scope to accommodate the projected future demand within the existing infrastructure, although the key issues identified with regards the current stock of courts will need to be addressed. Equally, the potential gaps in access to the north and east of the borough mean that tennis provision may need to be considered in the event of significant housing growth
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Bowls

Summary	Assessment Findings	Specific Facility Issues
Supply	- There are 7 sites containing functional bowling greens which is consistent with 2021 - There are quality issues at all venues. In particular, there is a need to improve the maintenance procedures, with a particular focus on out of season reinstatement works - Availability of volunteers to support maintenance works remains a key challenge - Level of ancillary facilities is also varying – at some sites facilities are particularly lacking and there is an aspiration for upgrades	- Maintenance improvements at all sites - Improvements to off green infrastructure - pavilions
Demand	- Participation in Darlington is declining, with league entries slightly reduced. Nationally the number of bowlers is increasing but participation continues to struggle in the North East - All greens have an active bowls club, but falling membership is identified as a key concern at several sites. - All clubs have capacity for new members and are actively recruiting - Sustainability remains key priority	Falling membership attributed to poor signage / lack of awareness / marketing, as well as issues securing volunteer commitment. Clubs also believe that poor ancillary facilities negatively impacts on recruitment potential.
Adequacy of Provision	- No evidence of demand for additional facilities, all responding clubs have scope to accommodate existing members - Club membership is varying, but many clubs are below national average levels. Both North Park and North Lodge Park have memberships low enough that sustainability is questionable. Increases in number of players at these sites are crucial to improve sustainability of existing facility network - The views of the bowling community suggest that improved quality is of significantly greater priority than the provision of additional greens – investment into maintenance in particular will be critical if greens are to continue to meet the demand that is evident - Population growth is likely to generate demand for 61 additional bowlers – this can be accommodated within the existing infrastructure	No additional greens required to meet demand, but all existing infrastructure, with possible exception of North Park, important to retain
Key Issues for Strategy to address	- All existing active greens (except North Park) are required to meet current and projected future demand. There is no requirement for new greens - Qualitative improvements are necessary if facilities are to continue to meet local needs – maintenance is the key focus but works to ancillary facilities are also needed - Clubs require support to improve participation and recruit new members.	

Hockey

Summary	Assessment Findings	Specific Facility Issues
Supply	- There is one sand based full sized AGP suitable for hockey at Carmel College - This pitch was opened in 2017 and remains in good condition. Changing facilities have been recently refurbished	While facility remains in good condition it may reach end of it's lifespan within this strategy period
Demand	- There are two hockey clubs playing and training in the Borough, both using the AGP at Carmel College. - Darlington Hockey Club are the largest club in the Borough, with a strong adult and junior section - Bishop Auckland HC also play in Darlington, but are considered to be displaced as the Durham Playing Pitch Strategy seeks to relocate them back to their home area - Total demand equates to up to 7 hours activity for training, as well as three MES on a Saturday for match play	Club have dedicated access to facilities at Carmel College and it will be important that this venue remains available to meet their needs
Adequacy of Provision	- Pitch is exclusively used for hockey, so significant spare capacity is evident midweek - Site is not proactively marketed as available for other sports. Whilst this is positive for hockey, it may impact on sustainability long term - Spare capacity at peak time is equivalent to 1 MES. If Bishop Auckland HC relocate, this will increase to 1.5 MES - Population growth will have limited impact on demand for hockey, with no additional teams created although participation will increase within each age group - The existing pitch offers capacity for any growth that arises through club development initiatives - One pitch is therefore sufficient to meet both current and projected future demand.	- Potential need / opportunity to increase usage on pitch - Need for early conversations to start to ensure that replacement surface is planned
Key Issues for Strategy to address	- Importance of protecting the existing pitch for hockey – it is essential that this pitch remains as sand based - Ageing surface means that facility may reach it's end of lifespan during this strategy period - With 1 pitch required to service demand, there is a need to ensure that plans and funding are in place to maintain continuity of this facility - The continuation of the ongoing positive relationship between Carmel College, Darlington HC and Darlington Borough Council will be vital in supporting hockey	

Rugby Union

Summary	Assessment Findings	Specific Facility Issues
Supply	- Two club bases containing 7 pitches (plus one unused pitches) as well as 3 pitches at school sites (although the pitch at Wyvern Academy is not accessible to the community) - No 3G AGP that is WR22 compliant for rugby use. - At Darlington RFC the first team pitch is shared with Darlington FC. The long term future of this arrangement remains unclear, but the quality of this pitch is good and it is able to accommodate the football and rugby activity that is required. Outside of this pitch, the quality of pitches is poor and there are significant issues with drainage. Maintenance is also limited. The condition of pitch 5 is so poor that the club are not using it this year and have instead identified it as a potential location for an AGP - Pitch quality is also poor at Darlington Modwen Park. There are fewer quality concerns with the main pitch, although this is only of standard quality, but the outer pitches are poor, suffering from drainage issues and poor grass coverage. - Issues are also identified with ancillary provision at both sites. Both clubs require investment to meet the needs of the wide range of participants in club rugby – facilities are required to support rugby union for male and female rugby as well as the wide variety of ages that the clubs accommodate simultaneously	- Poor quality of existing club based pitches outside of the first team pitches - Limited maintenance programmes - Lack of floodlighting at Darlington RFC - Lack of WR compliant 3G AGP to service training needs for both clubs
Demand	39 teams identified across the two rugby clubs compared to 34 at time of previous PPS- this represents a positive increase - Almost all growth has taken place in female rugby - High training demand as well as match play, with several teams in both clubs training twice weekly - Clubs report a lack of access to 3G AGP and appropriate training facilities - Population growth, as well as club development aspirations, will see generation of additional age grade and youth teams, adding to the demand that is already evident	- Increasing demand for girls and female rugby in particular - Increasing participation placing additional pressure on pitches but also ancillary facilities (which must also be suitable for all teams) - Clubs report issues with a lack of access to 3G AGP
Adequacy of Provision	- Main pitch at both sites reserved for first team (plus professional football at Darlington FC) / occasional 'show play' and consequently played within level pitches can sustain - All other pitches demonstrate significant overplay - At both sites, the overplay that is evident is exacerbated when taking into account the high training demand	- Overplay at both sites - Lack of access to appropriate training facilities - Lack of capacity to accommodate growth in demand

	• The impact of training is concentrated on just the floodlit pitches. Whilst all pitches at Darlington Mowden Park are floodlit meaning that demand is spread, at Darlington RFC, there is limited floodlit provision which means that training is concentrated and overplay is intensified • The additional demand that will be generated through population growth and development aspirations may require up to 2 additional pitches to sustain this demand	
Key Issues for Strategy to address	• The need to protect existing rugby grounds • The poor quality of existing grass pitches which restricts site capacity and generates overplay • The limited maintenance procedures, which again limit site capacity • The lack of appropriate facilities to support club training • Insufficient capacity within the existing infrastructure to meet both current and projected future demand (match play and training). • Challenges with the provision of appropriate ancillary facilities	

Scenario Testing – Rugby Union

- 2.13 Modelling set out in the assessment report clearly demonstrates that the quality of grass pitch provision is influenced by the limited quality at both rugby union sites.
- 2.14 Table 2.3 explores the impact that qualitative improvements would have on addressing the capacity pressures that are identified. It indicates that whilst pitch quality improvements would have significant impacting in terms of the capacity of each site, and would enable all match play to be accommodated without overplay, overplay will still remain across the site as a whole once the impact of training is taken into account.

Table 2.3 – Impact of improving quality on site capacity

	Number of Pitches	Current Ratings	Current Capacity	Improved Capacity	Matchplay demand	Training Demand	Site Position
Darlington Mowden Park	3	2 x basic, 1 x poor	7.2	9.9	7.38	8.5	-5.98
Darlington RFC	4	3 x basic 1 x poor	9.8	13.2	7.88	9	-3.67

- 2.15 This suggests therefore that additional consideration is required as to how training can be accommodated.
- 2.16 At Darlington RFC, with only one floodlit pitch available, all training activity is concentrated on one pitch. The poor quality and consequential limited capacity of this pitch means that significant overplay is therefore evident on this pitch. With training demand equivalent to 9 MES, it is clear that three pitches of a good standard (capacity 3.3 MES) are required to be floodlit just to meet training demand (with additional capacity required to support match play). Whilst adding floodlights would improve the spread of overplay therefore, it would not solve the issues that are identified at this site.
- 2.17 At Darlington Mowden Park, pitches are already all floodlit and training activity can be spread. There is therefore no option to provide further floodlighting to address the capacity pressures.
- 2.18 It is apparent therefore, that even if pitch quality was improved, and additional floodlighting was provided at Darlington RFC to enable training to be more effectively spread, that there is not enough capacity at either site to accommodate all training and match play without overplay.
- 2.19 Table 2.4 therefore evaluates the options to provide the additional capacity that is needed - this includes provision of an AGP and additional pitch provision on site.

Table 2.4 – Providing additional capacity

Club	Additional Total Pitch HOURS requirement for site	Indicative additional TOTAL pitch (space) requirement on site	Additional Floodlit pitch (space) requirement	Minimum additional Floodlit pitch hours needed
Darlington RFC	9.31	2.3	2.38	9.50
Darlington Mowden Park RFC	11.81	3.0	0.19	0.75

Football

Summary	Assessment Findings	Specific Facility Issues
Supply	71 grass pitches offer secured community use, further 10 unsecured - Half of all pitches serve younger age groups – 9v9 / 7v7 / 5v5 5 full sized 3G AGP also provided, all of which are on FA 3G AGP register (4 available for community use) - The total number of pitches has reduced slightly since the 2021 SFS - Pitch quality has improved significantly since 2021 and over 50% of pitches assessed as part of the FA PitchPower scheme are good. That said, there remain a small number of pitches (10%) that are poor and several others that are in the lower echelons of a standard quality rating. Where quality issues occur, these are generally associated with drainage, compaction and pitch surface issues as was the case in 2021 - Despite the improvements that have taken place, club dissatisfaction remains high. The main concerns identified are a lack of pitches (particularly 3G) for both match play and training. Clubs highlight particular difficulties in securing access to 3G pitches for training - There are also concerns that poor ancillary facilities are a barrier to participation on some sites – there are sites with no provision and others where facilities are insufficient for the number / variety of teams that are participating	- Quality issues at key sites - this is particularly critical at St Aidans Academy and Teesside Airport, where large clubs are based. DCFA are already working with both clubs to support improvement works (and as of July 2026, both clubs have been awarded GPMF grants) - Quality issues at other sites (in particular at Council owned parks venues) where pitch quality is poor and this limits both player experience but also the capacity that is offered). The main issues mirror those outlined in 2021 – drainage, compaction and poor pitch surface
Demand	- There are 220 Darlington based teams affiliated this season, which represents significant growth from the position in 2021 - With the exception of adult football, there has been growth in all forms of the game - Clubs highlight a lack of 3G AGPs for matches and training as the key barrier to growth - Modelling suggests that there is demand for six 3G AGPs based on current participation - Education demand is also an important consideration, given the important role that many of the school sites play in meeting club demand - Darlington FC is the highest performing club in Darlington, with the team currently playing in The National League North (Step 2 of the National League System (NLS)). Whilst the club have now played at Blackwell Meadows for ten years, they continue to explore options to secure their long term future. There is a need to ensure that they have capacity to grow and progress within the NLS (as well as potentially into the football league) and to as ensure that the club's training	- Lack of car parking at Staindrop Road means that these pitches are not used. There are also several sites where ancillary provision is not adequate and is impacting the ability to sustain play, including Blackwell Meadows, Darlington RA, Priory Hurworth House - Opportunities to increase use of Carmel College / Wyvern Academy in particular

	requirements are met. Darlington Town FC also play in the NLS, and there are several other teams that are playing in feeder leagues to the NLS. Should any of these achieve progression, their progression will be subject to ground grading facility requirements. 3G AGP Pitch 2 at Eastbourne Academy could accommodate this activity.	(community use agreement currently not enacted at Wyvern)
Adequacy of Provision	- Quality has improved significantly since the previous strategy, and this has maximised the capacity of the existing pitch stock. There are few poor pitches remaining, although some quality issues continue to impact play (particularly drainage) - The increases in quality have however only enabled the growth in participation to be sustained. A significant rise in the number of teams means that demand is much higher than it has ever been before and consequently, modelling demonstrates that despite the improvements, supply remains closely matched with demand, specifically; - There is adequate capacity overall for adult football, with spare capacity across the week and at peak time. It is evident however that some of this spare capacity is on poorer quality sites and that the quality of adult pitches is much lower than the quality of smaller pitches. Spare capacity at peak time remains adequate, but is reduced when poor quality and unsecured sites are eliminated. - There are insufficient youth pitches at peak time to meet demand, which reflects the challenges scheduling matches reported by clubs - The availability of 9v9 pitches is also limited, with supply only just able to meet demand at peak time (0.5 MES spare capacity). - There is greater availability on 7v7 and 5v5 pitches, in part due to increasing use of 3G AGPs for smaller sided games. There are some pitches that are now rarely used (primarily those on sites that also contain 3G AGPs) but clear pressures on other sites where there are no AGPs and large numbers of teams needing to play (for example Priory Hurworth House, St Aidans, Blackwell Meadows). 3G AGPs are important in Darlington for both training and match play and consultation suggests that 3G AGPs are the preferred surface for the majority of teams (due to the benefits that they offer in terms of consistency in the context of the weather in North East England) There is a deficit of 2 – 3 3G AGPs (for football alone) to meet current demand and this will increase as further participation growth and / or population increases are experienced - Future population growth, alongside likely increases in participation that arise from football development, will generate increased demand for all forms of football, but will increase deficiencies of grass youth 9v9 and youth 11v11 football in particular	- Lack of 3G AGP for both training and match play (at least 3 required) - Question marks over long term location of Darlington FC

	In addition to the challenges of providing enough capacity for match play and training, there are also concerns with regards access to changing facilities on some sites. Appropriate facilities are vital to support the growth of women and girls football, as well as to sustain junior and adult activity, and the provision that is available falls below the levels required at several sites.	
Key Issues for Strategy to address	- The existing infrastructure for football is only just able to support existing participation and all facilities therefore require protection - There is a need to provide additional capacity, particularly for youth and 9v9 football. Any spare capacity that is available is largely spread out and generally at small / single pitch sites (that are often poor, lacking in ancillary facilities or are associated with other issues, such as poor parking). There is no remaining capacity at the majority of hub sites and sites accommodating large numbers of teams - There is demand for additional 3G AGPs, with modelling suggesting that at least three additional pitches are required (at least 3 to meet current demand if taking into account demand generated by rugby union)- additional provision would improve the infrastructure available for both match play and training - There remain quality issues on some grass pitches that will need to be addressed – particularly on large club bases and on adult football pitches - The pressures on the existing infrastructure mean that there is heavy usage on many sites. There is consequently a reliance on strong maintenance programmes to keep up with this usage – this will need to be sustained over the next strategy period - There is a need to improve ancillary provision to ensure that this does not limit participation and growth - Whilst there are capacity pressures across the borough, there are opportunities to alleviate scheduling issues through the use of sites that are not currently used - Carmel College and Wyvern Academy both provide several pitches and use of these by clubs would help reduce the existing constraints on capacity - Significant forecast population growth is likely to generate increased demand, which will result in even greater pressures on the existing infrastructure (particularly youth 11v11 and 9v9 pitches) as well as a higher deficit of 3G AGP. Additional pitches are likely to be required to address this growth - Potential ongoing increases in participation will see these deficiencies increase further.	

Scenario Modelling for Football

- 2.20 The assessment report provides full details of extensive modelling undertaken for football. It also reports that whilst quality has significantly improved since the previous SFS, there remain some sites where quality issues persist, and this impacts on the capacity that that site offers.

Improving Pitches that are Poor Quality

- 2.21 Scenario modelling demonstrates that if poor quality pitches are improved to standard quality, there would be relatively limited impact (primarily due to the small number of pitches rated as poor). The key messages in this scenario are that;
- The greatest impact would be on adult pitches – 3 additional MES would be created across the week and 1.5MES spare capacity becomes available at peak time
 - On youth pitches, 1 MES spare capacity would become available at peak time. An increase of 1 MES would also be generated across the week
 - There would be no change to the position for 9v9 football
 - There would be an increase of 1 MES at peak time on a 7v7 pitch and 2 across the week.
 - On 5v5 pitches, overplay at St Aidans School would be eliminated, 0.5 MES spare capacity at Longfield Academy would become available. Overall 4 MES additional capacity would be added across the week.
- 2.22 Modelling shows that improvement of all pitches to good quality, which would maximise the capacity of existing grass pitches would have greater impact, as outlined below in Table 2.5. There would be just enough capacity on youth and 9v9 pitches, although there would be almost no spare capacity remaining, despite the significant investment required to bring pitches up to this high standard.

Table 2.5 – Improvement of all pitches to good quality

Pitch Type	Scenario	Current (All community Pitches)
Adult Pitches	Weekly Position	49.5
Adult Pitches	Peak Time	20
Youth Pitches	Weekly Position	20.5
Youth Pitches	Peak Time	2.5
9v9	Weekly Position	21.5
9v9	Peak Time	1
7v7	Weekly Position	73
7v7	Peak Time	8
5v5	Weekly Position	86
5v5	Peak Time	10

- 2.23 Although Table 2.5 demonstrates that improvement to good would address the challenges identified in meeting current demand, Table 2.6 confirms that in future years, if growth was to occur at the same rate as it did over the previous PPS period (2021 – 2026), or even at a rate of 10% growth (as opposed to 20%) there would once be again insufficient provision of youth and 9v9 football pitches, even if all pitches were of good quality.

Table 2.6 – Impact of Improving all Pitches to Good Quality (Future)

Pitch Type	Current Position at Peak Time (Secured Community Use)	Future Position at Peak Time (MES) for 10% additional increase	Future Position at Peak Time (MES) for 20% additional increase
Adult 11v11	20	18	15
Youth 11v11	2.5	0	-4
9v9	1	-2	-4.5
7v7	8	5.5	3
5v5	10	7.5	5

- 2.24 This scenario therefore suggests that qualitative investments alone will not be sufficient to meet future capacity requirements. New capacity will therefore be required and it is likely that this will need to be delivered through both additional grass pitches and access to further 3G AGP for match play.

Importance of Retaining Pitch Quality – Implications if quality was to deteriorate.

- 2.25 The 2021 Strategy placed significant importance on the improvement of grass pitches across Darlington and this 2026 assessment has demonstrated that successful implementation of the strategy has resulted in additional capacity being created.
- 2.26 Table 2.7 emphasises the importance of retaining these improvements. It demonstrates that if instead of further improvements taking place (as in Tables 2.5 and 2.6) pitches that are currently of standard quality were to decline to a poor rating, supply would become more closely balanced with demand, and some unmet demand would be evident. If all pitches were of poor quality, there would be significant deficiencies in 9v9 and youth football.

Table 2.7 – Impact of Reducing Quality

Pitch Type	Scenario	Standard quality pitches become poor	All pitches become poor
Adult Pitches	Weekly Position	19.5	-4.5
Adult Pitches	Peak Time	8	4.5
Youth Pitches	Weekly Position	3.5	-15.5
Youth Pitches	Peak Time	-1	3.5
9v9	Weekly Position	15.5	-8.5
9v9	Peak Time	-1.5	-2
7v7	Weekly Position	37	13
7v7	Peak Time	6	6
5v5	Weekly Position	62	18
5v5	Peak Time	8.5	8.5

- 2.27 Table 2.7 confirms that quality deterioration would potentially cause the greatest issues for 9v9 / youth 11v11 play – this is because supply is already closely matched with demand. The biggest impact would however be on adult pitches, with much of the existing spare capacity eroded.
- 2.28 It is important to note that the deterioration in quality would have greater impact on the capacity across the week than at peak time. Table 2.7 clearly demonstrates that for some forms of football, there are shortfalls of capacity across the week (due to overplay on key sites), although some individual pitches would have theoretically have actual spare capacity at peak time.

- 2.29 The shortfalls of capacity across the week arise because a poor quality pitch is able to sustain only one game per week, and this means that any games outside of the peak period automatically cannot be accommodated (and hence the shortfalls in capacity are evident).
- 2.30 Female football often takes place outside of the peak time for male football, meaning that pitches are increasingly required in several timeslots. With increasing demand for women and girls football occurring alongside the continuing growth of male football, it is therefore increasingly critically important that pitches have enough capacity to sustain games in multiple timeslot in the same week. Quality is crucial in enabling this.

Athletics– Summary and key Issues	Key Facility Issues
Supply • There is one 8 lane synthetic track located at Eastbourne Sports Complex. This facility includes full facilities for field events and is fully floodlit. It is managed by Darlington Borough Council • This track is high quality as it was fully refurbished in 2023 although there are some wear and tear issues that need to be addressed, primarily relating to the equipment (high jump mat, throwing cage, storage container). • Eastbourne Sports Complex is currently accredited to host Level 1 competitions. No competitions have however taken place since the site was refurbished and the track mark accreditation for competitions has not been • There is also a 400m cinder track located at Longfield Academy. This is poor quality and used for curricular activity only	
Demand • Active Lives Surveys report increasing participation since the covid pandemic. The proportion of young people participating in athletics is also increasing • Darlington Harriers is the largest athletics club in the Borough and one of the largest athletics clubs in the north east. The club are experiencing strong demand at a junior level and social running is also increasing. As the main users of the track, the club currently rent the facility for six hours per week • Darlington Triathlon Club, Darlington Quakers, Darlo Harriers and Allerton Junior Athletics Club also rent the athletics track at Eastbourne Sports Complex. The facility is also open to casual users as well as organised groups • Outside of school use, there is no known community demand for the existing poor quality cinder track at Longfield Academy • In addition, it is evident that there is strong participation in cross country and road running in Darlington, with both Darlington Harriers and Quakers Running Club participating in these activities, and pop up clubs that are unaffiliated to England Athletics but still engaging with running and athletics also evident • All clubs raise cost of access to facilities, alongside volunteers and coaches as the key barriers to increasing demand	• Some improvements required at Eastbourne Sports Complex –equipment / storage • Opportunities to host competitions at Eastbourne Sports Complex, particularly if spectator seating is provided • Poor quality cinder track at Longfield Academy

Adequacy of Existing Provision

Analysis demonstrates that;

- Residents of Darlington are well served in terms of the facilities available, with all residents within the 20minute drivetime catchment of the strategic venue at Eastbourne Sports Complex. Access is therefore strong
- Having recently been refurbished, this track is of high quality. There are however some key immediate priorities to ensure ongoing functionality of the equipment (high jump mat, throws cage)
- Whilst the athletics track is well used, accommodating track sessions for several clubs, there is scope for further usage. Although the site has achieved TrackMark Accreditation, there are no competitions currently held at the site despite the high quality of facilities that are provided. There are aspirations to further enhance the facility through the delivery of seating which would help to bring back competition to the town
- Access to the track is good although clubs raise concerns in relation to the pricing of this facility, identifying this as a barrier to participation. Although Darlington BC have undertaken a benchmarking exercise in order to ensure that the costs associated with track hire are in line with other similar facilities, it will be important to ensure that this is regularly reviewed to maximise accessibility to the facility
- The synthetic surface at Eastbourne Sports Complex is supported by a cinder athletics track at Longfield Academy. This is poor quality and currently has limited role to play in community activity. Located on the other side of town from Eastbourne Sports Complex, there is potential to increase the role that this facility plays in meeting demand for athletics, particularly social / recreational athletics. England Athletics note that there may be an opportunity to explore wider community use of this facility to support recreational running
- Opportunities to create informal opportunities for athletics as part of the creation of Active Environments for new development were also highlighted.

- Key Issues for the Strategy to Address
- The above therefore suggests that the strategy will need to;
- Protect the existing athletics track
- Ensure that accreditation at Eastbourne Sports Complex is maintained (and potentially improved to secure Level 2 status)
- Seek to provide spectator facilities at Eastbourne Sports Complex if competition returns to the track
- Create a positive partnership between DBC and the Clubs to maximise the potential of facilities at Eastbourne Sports Complex and promote participation in athletics
- Consider the future of the cinder track at Longfield Academy and the opportunities for this site to play a greater role in meeting recreational athletics demand
- Explore opportunities to create active environments for athletics as part of new development.

Sports Halls

Summary	Assessment Findings	Specific Facility Issues
Supply	- Darlington has 16 sports halls across ten sites that are available for community use - The total sports hall space in Darlington is the equivalent of 56.3 badminton courts. The space available for community use in the weekly peak period is the equivalent of 42.9 courts - Darlington has 4.9 courts per 10,000 population. This is higher than the regional average of 4.7 courts per 10,000 population and the national average of 4.0 courts, so the supply is good and the borough is well provided for - However the Dolphin Centre is the only public leisure centre in Darlington - The educational sector provides nine of the ten sites, accounting for circa 80% of the available capacity in the weekly peak period. The Dolphin Centre is the only public leisure centre and provides 21% of the available capacity in the weekly peak period - Polam Hall School, which did not have a sports hall at the time of the last strategy, have planning permission for a new 3-court hall, which will add further to the educational supply - The largest individual sports hall in Darlington is the eight-court main hall at the Dolphin Centre. This size of sports hall can accommodate multiple sports activities at the same time, while also providing a show court for events with spectator seating and specialist sport use - The remaining main halls are all four-court halls - The average age of the sports hall sites in 2025 is 30 years. The Dolphin Centre opened in 1982 and was refurbished in 2006. Two of the three sites opened before 2000 have been refurbished, but none of the four sites opened between 2004 and 2009 has been modernised.	- Given that nearly all the sports hall stock is provided by the educational sector, this does restrict residents who require access during weekday daytimes and places greater reliance and pressure on The Dolphin Centre to provide for these residents - Furthermore it also creates challenges in terms of access and continuity of use, particularly during exam time and can restrict specialist sports use, both in terms of access and sports halls being fit for purpose in terms of technical specifications - There is an increasing need for refurbishment of the sports halls as the stock ages. The oldest sport hall site is Carmel College, which opened in 1960 and is unmodernised, as was the case in the previous strategy - Ensuring any upgrades and investment meet required sports and club technical requirements will be important - The Dolphin Centre is the most highly utilised, which adds to the pressures set out above. There appears scope for greater access and usage at the education sites, but this will have to be balanced against competing pressures from schools - These technical, access and management challenges are being faced by clubs across the borough in respect of sports halls.

Demand	97% of Darlington's demand for sports halls is met. This is higher than the regional average and national average of 95% - A large proportion of Darlington's satisfied demand is met within the Borough, at 89%. The sports halls are very accessible to the Borough's residents - Unmet demand totals the equivalent of 0.9 courts. Residents who are too far from a sports hall account for all the unmet demand. Unmet demand of 0.1 courts in two square kilometres southeast of Darlington town centre. Across the rest of the Borough unmet demand per square kilometre is less than 0.1 courts. Unmet demand is concentrated in the Darlington town centre area, Middleton St George, Hurworth-on-Tees and Neasham. The largest amount of reachable unmet demand per square kilometre is 0.4 courts in 26 square kilometres distributed across the south of the Borough from the west of Darlington town centre - The overall estimated used capacity of the sports halls in Darlington during the weekly peak period is 51%. This is lower than the regional average of 57% and the national average of 66%.	- There is sufficient supply to meet Darlington's demand, there is not a need to increase provision. However, the available supply needs to be protected for community use - The demand for sports halls is met by the accessible supply. Nearly all the satisfied demand is met within the Borough. Unmet demand is very low - The sports halls do however have unused capacity at peak times, access and management rather than supply is therefore the key issue. The educational sports hall supply needs to be protected for community use, in order to ensure this balance remains - The Dolphin Centre is the most important site in the Borough. It is the largest site and meets the greatest number of visits. The centre is available to all residents and provides for all activities. It is located in the area of highest demand and highest deprivation and it therefore a vital provision.
Key Issues for Strategy to address	- There is sufficient supply to meet Darlington's demand, there is not a need to increase provision. However, the available supply needs to be protected for community use - The demand for sports halls is met by the accessible supply. Nearly all the satisfied demand is met within the Borough. Unmet demand is very low. The sports halls do however have unused capacity at peak times, access and management rather than supply is therefore the key issue to address for clubs and specialist sports use - There is some justification for additional large indoor space to meet specialist sport needs, of which netball and tennis have key needs, along with basketball and table tennis. Whether there are opportunities for a multi-sport indoor solution should be explored - The Dolphin Centre is the most important site in the Borough. It is the largest site and meets the greatest number of visits. The centre is available to all residents and provides for all activities. It is located in the area of highest demand and highest deprivation and it therefore a vital provision - New demand generated by residential development, can be met in the main by the existing Darlington supply of sports halls. However there will be increase in usage/throughput across the sports hall sites, which will have impacts, the capacity at sports halls will be more stretched. This will be further exacerbated if school sports hall access alters - There is general capacity to cope with growth but there will be impacts, particularly at Dolphin Centre, where there will be a need for on-going investment and modernisation. Increased pressure on the Dolphin centre, priority for investment - Given its age the educational sports hall supply also needs to be invested in and protected for community use - Supply and demand therefore clearly illustrates that there will be impacts of the projected growth that will require financial contributions. Investment	

	should therefore be sought investment to improve the quality and capacity at the key sports hall sites in line with the application of Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator tool • Contributions from developments should be sought in the main to maintain and enhance the sports hall stock, in terms of upgrading and refurbishment • future sports hall investment should set out a need based on sports development and NGB requirements • Any new provision should clearly meet identified gaps, following consideration of supply and demand balance at the time and should focus on specialist provision and smaller flexible spaces to deliver health and physical activity programmes in localities.
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Swimming Pools

Summary	Assessment Findings	Specific Facility Issues
Supply	- There are eight swimming pools across six sites in Darlington that are available for community use. Wyvern school pool has permanently closed since the last strategy - Darlington has 16 sqm of water per 1,000 population, which is higher than the regional average of 12 sqm of water per 1,000 population and the national average of 11 sqm of water - The total water space in Darlington is 1,669 sqm of water. When scaled against the amount available during the weekly peak period, this is equivalent to 1,213 sqm of water. Therefore, 27% of the total water space in the Borough is unavailable for community use - The swimming pool stock is however ageing. The average age of all the sites is 37 years and the only public leisure centre is 43 years old. However, there is a good track record of modernisation, with five of the six sites having been refurbished, including The Dolphin Centre in 2023 - There is one public leisure centre in Darlington, The Dolphin Centre, which is operated in-house by the Council. It is the largest swimming pool site in the Borough and the only site with more than one pool - The educational sector is the largest provider in terms of sites, with three of the six sites. The three educational pool sites in the Borough are all single pools. Darlington Education Village is operated in-house by the school. It is available for hire to swimming clubs and also operates a learn-to-swim school. Hummersknott Academy is operated in-house but also uses SchoolHire, an external online platform, for advertising and booking its facilities. The pool is available for community hire and operates a learn-to-swim school through two external providers. Longfield Academy is operated via a PFI contract and is available to residents through membership for recreational and fitness swimming activities. The school also operates a learn-to-swim programme through an external provider - Pay and play recreational swimming sessions at the education sites is	- The swimming pool stock is ageing. The average age of all the sites is 37 years and the only public leisure centre is 43 years old. - Public swimming is more limited given the management and access policies outwith the Dolphin Centre, so whilst supply is good and in excess of demand there are management and access challenges in ensuring public accessibility to the available stock.

	limited, access is focussed on organised club use or swimming lessons There are two commercial providers – both are single-pool sites. Rockcliffe Hall swimming pool is available for community use for residents who hold a spa or resort membership. Bannatyne Health Club is available for community use through membership. It provides for recreational swimming and also operates a learn-to-swim school on a one-to-one or one-to-two basis.	
Demand	- The resident population generates demand for 7,059 visits in the weekly peak period, which is below the available capacity of 10,618 visits. The water space required to meet Darlington's demand comfortably is 1,161 sqm of water, which is below the Borough's available supply of 1,213 sqm of water. - In 2025, 97% of the demand for swimming pools from Darlington residents is met. This is the highest proportion in the study area, and higher than both the regional and national averages of 93% - A very high proportion of Darlington's demand is met within the Borough, at 90%. This proportion is the highest in the study area. There is a close correlation between the swimming pool locations and areas of highest demand - Unmet demand totals 36 sqm of water with a comfort factor included. Residents who are too far from a swimming pool account for 98% of this. Unmet demand due to lack of swimming pool capacity equates to less than 1 sqm of water - The Dolphin Centre is estimated to be uncomfortably full at peak times, with 91% of capacity used. Darlington Education Village is estimated to be 100% utilised at peak times and Longfield Academy is 81% utilised.	- The key element to be taken from this report is that Darlington's demand for swimming pools can be met, and that supply exceeds demand. Nearly all the satisfied demand is met within the Borough. - The Dolphin Centre provides half the available capacity in the weekly peak period and accommodates all swimming activities. The distribution of demand and the attractiveness of the centre means it is estimated to be uncomfortably full at peak times (more than 70% of capacity used). - There is a very small amount of unmet demand that is located too far from a swimming pool. Unmet demand because of a lack of swimming pool capacity is negligible - Overall, Darlington's demand for swimming pools is met, but the Borough is very dependent on The Dolphin Centre to achieve this outcome. The pool site can accommodate all swimming activities in a recently refurbished site - There is a good correlation between supply and demand. Demand is highest in the town centre and north of the town centre. This area contains four of the six sites. Demand is low outside these areas and insufficient to support further provision of swimming pools to improve access for residents.
Key Issues for Strategy to address	- The key element to be taken from this report is that Darlington's demand for swimming pools can be met, and that supply exceeds demand. Nearly all the satisfied demand is met within the Borough - The Dolphin Centre provides half the available capacity in the weekly peak period and accommodates all swimming activities. The distribution of demand and the attractiveness of the centre means it is estimated to be uncomfortably full at peak times (more than 70% of capacity used). 0.4 There is a very small amount of unmet demand that is located too far from a swimming pool. Unmet demand because of a lack of swimming pool	

capacity is negligible

- Overall, Darlington's demand for swimming pools is met, but the Borough is very dependent on The Dolphin Centre to achieve this outcome. The pool site can accommodate all swimming activities in a recently refurbished site.
- There is a good correlation between supply and demand. Demand is highest in the town centre and north of the town centre. This area contains four of the six sites. Demand is low outside these areas and insufficient to support further provision of swimming pools to improve access for residents
- While supply is greater than demand across the Borough, the offer provided by The Dolphin Centre as the one public leisure centre, which is accessible to all residents, means it is uncomfortably full at peak times. It is also located in an area of 10% highest deprivation, which increases its importance as a centre accessible to all residents
- There is scope to increase the availability and capacity of the eight-lane pool at peak times. This should be implemented to create a better balance between supply and demand
- While the three educational swimming pools are small in scale and provide for a more limited range of activities, collectively they meet 1,950 visits in the weekly peak period. This is 26% of the used capacity of Darlington's swimming pools at peak times. Their access for community use should be protected
- There is therefore a need to protect all existing provision. Continue to invest in the Dolphin Centre. Education based provision should be protected. Seek to invest in the school pool network to facilitate greater community use and access
- The assessment provides an indication that the main swimming pools are already full and in need of investment to meet future needs. Growth will therefore impact on swimming needs both in terms of the existing supply, which will become busier
- Supply and demand therefore clearly illustrates that there will be impacts of the projected growth that will require financial contributions. Investment should therefore be sought to improve the quality and capacity at the key swimming pool sites in line with the application of Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator tool
- Any new provision should clearly meet identified gaps, following consideration of supply and demand balance at the time
- Contributions from developments should be sought in the main to maintain and enhance the existing swimming pool stock, in terms of upgrading and refurbishment. Any future swimming pool investment should set out a need based on sports development and NGB requirements.

Summary

- 2.31 This section has set out the key issues for each sport. Further detail, including a full assessment of the supply / demand position (and associated modelling) is available in the assessment report.
- 2.32 Section 3 draws therefore upon the information provided in this section and sets out a strategic framework for the delivery of outdoor sports facilities and playing fields. It also outlines the key recommendations on a sport by sport basis.
- 2.33 Section 4 provides a site by site action plan and summarises the priority recommendations.

3.0 Strategic Framework

Introduction

3.1 Section 2 summarised the context for each sport and the key issues that need to be addressed drawing upon consultation, supply and demand modelling and scenario testing. The full assessment is provided under separate cover.

3.2 This section sets out a strategy for the future delivery of sports facilities across Darlington and outlines the priority recommendations for each sport. As in the 2021 strategy, each recommendation will contribute to the achievement of the strategy vision, which is;

'To develop a comprehensive, robust, up to date and user friendly assessment of sports provision and need in Darlington to ensure that the right amount and type of sports facilities are protected, and where appropriate enhanced to provide a range of quality, accessible and safe facilities, in the right place at the right time to meet the needs of the community now and in future years.'

3.3 Consistent with previous versions of the strategy document, this strategy is based on the following principles;

- The strategy will continue to prioritise strategic hub sites and supports links between sports. Recognising the benefits and long term sustainability of larger sites and of those providing for multiple sports, the strategy will promote the use of larger facilities and the co-location of facilities
- Focus will be placed on maximising resources – the strategy will seek to maximise the capacity and function of facilities and to ensure that provision is adapted to meet with future requirements. This will include the continued use of school sites, which play a critical role in the provision of sports facilities in Darlington Borough
- Sustainability is a key focus – all recommendations seek to deliver new and improved facilities in a sustainable manner, supporting well established clubs and promoting good practice
- Quality of facilities is as important as the amount of provision – the strategy seeks to ensure that the borough contains the right amount of facilities, of the right quality and in the right place. It recognises the need to sustain and improve the quality of existing facilities and the subsequent investment required
- Investment will focus upon interventions that will have the greatest impact – the strategy seeks to prioritise investment into sites where the highest impact will be felt and where high numbers of users will benefit. It will seek to increase participation in sport and activity in terms of both numbers and standards.

3.4 As with previous sports facility strategies, this strategy promotes partnership working, not only between users and providers of facilities, but also between different sports. There are many benefits of joint working and knowledge sharing, and partnership working will be increasingly important if the needs of all sports are to be met. Darlington has a strong track record in partnership working within and across sports and it is intended that this will continue over the next strategy period.

Strategic Objectives

3.5 The strategy objectives remain consistent with previous versions of the Sports Facility Strategy and are set out under three headings of;

- Protect
- Enhance
- Provide

Protect

- SO1: Safeguard all existing sports facilities in line with Paragraph 104 of the National Planning Policy Framework, irrespective of ownership and the degree of access and use. The action plan in this strategy will clearly identify any facilities that are not required to meet current or projected future needs
- SO2: Protect access to sports facilities by promoting long term agreements with schools and other landowners to facilitate ongoing investment and improvement
- SO3: Maximise community use of indoor and outdoor sports facilities at school sites where this will benefit the overall facility stock.

Protection of Playing Fields and Sports Facilities

- 3.6 NPPF policy requires that indoor and outdoor sports facilities, as well as playing fields are afforded protection unless specific exception criteria are met. Sport England Playing Field policy also seeks to protect playing fields.
- 3.7 Section 2 has summarised how for some sports, there is insufficient capacity to meet current and /or projected future demand. As such, the focus of this strategy is protection. This does not preclude the development of any site, particularly where sporting benefits could be delivered, but policy should be complied with to ensure that sites are protected where required and that overall, sporting benefits are delivered.
- 3.8 The Darlington Local Plan review, which is currently out for consultation, will continue to include policies that seek to protect the existing playing fields and outdoor sports facilities, as well as policy that supports the creation of new facilities where they are required.

Protecting and Securing Community Use

- 3.9 Ensuring ongoing secured access to sites is a critical component of the delivery of this strategy. School sites are already a crucial part of the infrastructure, with many of the larger sports hubs operated by schools, particularly for community football. The loss of school facilities would see numerous clubs displaced. This strategy therefore continues to promote the use of school sites and prioritises action to work alongside schools to protect and formalise long term agreements as well as securing agreement for access to sites that are not currently available. Scenario modelling demonstrates the impact that the loss of some key community venues would have on the adequacy of provision.
- 3.10 Secured access to other sites is also vital in ensuring the longevity of the pitch stock for clubs. This strategy seeks to support clubs to obtain leases where relevant, enabling access to funding as well as guaranteeing long term use of a site.

Enhance

- SO4: Ensure that the quality of facilities provided is appropriate to the level and standard of play that is sustained and that it promotes participation in sport
- SO5: Ensure that sports facilities are accompanied by appropriate ancillary facilities (e.g. sports lighting and changing provision)
- SO6: Ensure that facilities are maintained appropriately for the activities that they are sustaining and to maximise long term capacity
- SO7: Work in partnership with key stakeholders and voluntary organisations to secure funding.

- 3.11 Pitch quality significantly influences the adequacy of provision across all sports and there is a direct relationship between quality and the amount of activity that can be sustained. On many sites, the quality of provision has significantly improved since the last strategy. The improvements made have provided the increased capacity necessary to meet the growing demand in Darlington. Nevertheless, quality remains a challenge on some sites, with quality still restricting capacity and / or impacting on the player experience.
- 3.12 Qualitative issues were highlighted by the majority of clubs as the key issue impacting club development and satisfaction and there is a direct relationship between quality and the number of games that can be sustained. Qualitative improvements will remain a key focus of the strategy and will be particularly important for rugby union, as well as on some key sites for football. The quality of facilities for both tennis and bowls is also a much greater issue than the number of facilities that are provided.
- 3.13 Poor grass pitch / sports facility quality is often not a result of issues with the pitch, but more the appropriateness of the maintenance regime for the pitch conditions that takes into account the level/standard of play. Many sites in Darlington are heavily used and the strong maintenance programmes ensure that this level of activity can be sustained. A key priority of this strategy is therefore to ensure that these strong maintenance programmes are retained, and that maintenance is reviewed on all sites prior to rectifying any underlying quality issues (to ensure that quality issues are not caused by issues with the maintenance process).
- 3.14 Each NGB in partnership with the Grounds Management Association (GMA) can provide assistance with reviewing pitch maintenance regimes and use of the PitchPower tool clubs / providers to proactively seek advice and to tailor the maintenance procedures. The strategy focuses on ongoing engagement with these tools, ensuring that maintenance is tailored to the characteristics of the pitch and the demand experienced. Capital investment to address specific issues may subsequently be required on some sites (in addition to tailored maintenance schedules) and requirements can also be evaluated through the same pitch improvement programmes. It will be essential that providers have access to appropriate machinery, as well as to the knowledge of the maintenance procedures required. Equally, succession planning will be a key component of ensuring successful maintenance programmes over the long term.

Provide

- SO8: Address existing deficiencies in provision
- SO9: Ensure that new developments contribute towards the provision of new sports facilities and the enhancement of existing facilities
- SO10: Support clubs in the management and development of facilities

- 3.15 The strategy seeks to ensure that the infrastructure supports sustainable club development. In some instances, maintaining and growing participation will be essential if facilities are to remain sustainable (tennis, hockey, bowls,), whilst in others, additional capacity is required if club growth is not to be inhibited (football and rugby union in particular). Sustainable participation is vital if quality is to be maintained.
- 3.16 Whilst a large proportion of current and future demand can be met through a combination of;
- Sustaining the high quality of facilities that are now provided
 - Investing in facility maintenance to equip the facilities to sustain the required level of use
 - Improving quality to improve capacity where needed
 - Maximising the sustainability of existing sites, embracing new technological solutions and opportunities to improve the customer journey
 - Securing long term community use – both in terms of access agreements to school sites but also leases for community clubs.
- 3.17 Some new playing fields / sports facilities will also be required, particularly where larger deficiencies are identified (football) and where future demand cannot be met. Sport specific recommendations suggest that new playing field land may be required for football and new 3G AGPs will be required to support rugby union and football. The quality improvement that has taken place since the previous PPS has successfully improved capacity, but with demand continuing to grow, solutions to deliver new playing field land will now be required.
- 3.18 Growth generated by new housing development will add further pressures and forecasts of the adequacy of provision to meet future demand confirm that increased capacity will be necessary. This strategy seeks to ensure that all new development contributes to providing the increased capacity that is necessary. On site provision may be required in some new developments, or a new site may be developed by pooling contributions from a series of smaller developments.
- 3.19 To inform this, this strategy promotes the use of the Sport England Playing Pitch Calculator (PPC) and Sports Facility Calculator (SFC) to assess the impact of each specific new development and this will be discussed later in this section. This approach is also reflected in draft policy in the emerging Local Plan Review.
- 3.20 As well as mitigating the impact of any new development, it should also be ensured that that the existing sporting use of playing fields is not compromised by new development. For example, where there is a development that may prejudice the use of an existing cricket facility, there is a

requirement for a full ball strike risk assessment to be undertaken and appropriate mitigation put in place as part of the development.

Recommendations and Actions

- 3.21 The strategic objectives set out the framework for the delivery of playing fields and sports facilities across Darlington and guide the recommendations, which are set out in the sections that follow.
- 3.22 For ease of reference, recommendations are summarised by sport. To support the implementation of these recommendations, the tables also indicate the measures of success for each recommendation, who will deliver the action and by when.
- 3.23 Given the crossover between rugby union and football in the use of 3G AGPs, recommendations for 3G pitches are outlined separately.
- 3.24 For reference, the following acronyms are used in the site specific recommendations and action plan;
- DBC – Darlington Borough Council
 - ECB – England and Wales Cricket Board
 - DCFA – Durham County Football Association
 - FF – Football Foundation
 - RFU – Rugby Football Union
 - LTA – Lawn Tennis Association
 - EA – England Athletics
 - NTP – Non-Turf Pitch
 - AGP – Artificial Grass Pitch
 - PQA – Pitch Quality Assessment
 - CUA – Community Use Agreement
 - PP – PitchPower
 - GPMF – Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund
- 3.25 This action plan is followed by a site specific table, which outlines the key priorities at each site.

Table 3.1 – Sport Specific Recommendations

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
Cricket 1 (C1)	SO1	Safeguard all existing cricket grounds. Any proposals resulting in the loss of an existing cricket square should comply with NPPF policy. <i>NB: protection of cricket grounds should extend to protection of functionality. This should include ensuring that risk assessments (including ball strike assessments) are undertaken and appropriate mitigation is in place where new developments are located in close proximity to sites.</i>	Protection – all active club sites. In particular we note that there is a planning application for development adjacent to Haughton CC. The functionality of the cricket ground will need to be safeguarded (or the whole ground replaced in line with NPPF policy) if impacted.	- Keep list in strategy document protecting sites up to date. - Incorporate appropriate protection policy in emerging Local Plan. Loss of playing fields should only be permitted where a policy compliant solution is presented.	DBC / SE	Ongoing	- Inclusion of relevant policy - Protection of sites - Up to date list maintained of playing field provision
Cricket 2 (C2)	SO2	Ensure all cricket clubs have security of tenure by working alongside clubs to secure leases where they currently have no secure tenure, and supporting negotiations to extend leases where relevant	<i>Haughton CC – currently using existing site on an annual rolling contract. We note that there is a development proposed adjacent to the site – this may provide the opportunity to secure investment into this facility.</i>	- Work with Haughton CC to agree a lease – this will help the club gain access to funding support as well as guarantee long term security. - Support clubs to renegotiate existing leases where remaining time falls below accepted levels	Durham Cricket Board / ECB	Short term / ongoing	Meeting with Haughton CC Ongoing engagement with clubs and all clubs having secure tenure

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
			<i>Cockerton CC and Rockcliffe Park also both lease their sites</i>				
Cricket 3 (C3)	SO4, SO6, SO7, SO8	Improve quality by working with each club to tailor their maintenance programme to the needs of each ground. This should be delivered by: - Supporting clubs with the use of the PitchPower tool (and any subsequent technical report work) - Working with clubs to ensure that they have access to appropriate machinery - Supporting clubs in succession planning in relation to grounds maintenance.	Key priorities are; - Darlington RA – improved maintenance, may require further maintenance equipment (verticutter). Note this club are now receiving GPMF investment for 5v5 and 7v7 pitches - Cockerton CC – maintenance equipment (also require storage) - Middleton St George CC (additional turf management required) - Haughton CC	- Proactively work with clubs / providers to use the Pitch Power tool and / or commission Grounds. management reviews and to act on findings at all sites. - Support clubs in accessing appropriate machinery to maximise the effectiveness of maintenance regimes.	Durham Cricket Board / ECB/ Clubs	Short term	- Commission of Pitch Power assessments (PIP) for priority sites that have not been assessed - Implementation of tailored maintenance schedules for key sites through work alongside providers – evidence of improved maintenance regimes - Improved pitch quality – ideally all pitches to good quality - Successful funding applications (note Darlington RA have now received GMPF funding)
Cricket 4 (C4)	SO4, SO7, SO8	Invest in pitch quality improvements where pitch quality assessment (see Cricket 3) suggests this is still required following	Dependent upon PQA results, but potential	Work in partnership to identify detailed improvements	Durham Cricket Board / ECB	Medium to long term	Commission of Pitch Power assessments (PIP)

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
		maintenance improvements and where improvements are necessary to meet with league standards / needed to ensure that play can continue. This may include: • Drainage works • Outfield levelling • Work to improve the square • Provision of appropriate facilities (sight screens etc).	requirement at Cockerton CC for drainage works.	required through use of PQA (Recommendation C3). • Provide support and guidance to clubs in the submission of external funding bids. This should include the identification of opportunities.			for priority sites that have not been assessed • Evidence of improved pitch quality – ideally all pitches to good quality
Cricket 5 (C6)	SO5	Improve clubhouse and changing facilities to ensure all clubs have a basic facility of adequate standard (electricity / running water / changing rooms / basic kitchen) and facilities that can sustain use by all user groups. In particular, all sites that accommodate women and girls cricket should have appropriate facilities to deliver this.	The following pavilions currently require upgrade; • Darlington RA • Rockcliffe Park (extension) • Cockerton CC • Haughton CC	• Support clubs with proposals to upgrade pavilions / other improvements where necessary to meet recommendation. • Where clubs are eligible, provide support and guidance to clubs in the submission of external funding bids. This should include the identification of opportunities for funding.	Durham Cricket Board / ECB / Clubs	Medium – long term	• Upgrade of cricket pavilions • All clubs having a pavilion that is fit for purpose (including women and girls cricket where relevant) • Successful funding applications

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
Cricket 5 (C5)	SO8, SO9, SO10	Ensure that all clubs have access to appropriate capacity both to meet current demand, but also future demand. The following actions are required to deliver this; at each site - Support improvements to quality to improve square capacity (Cricket 3). Improvements to outfield will also ensure that programmes that take place on the outfield (including All Stars) can be effectively sustained - The creation of NTPs on the square - Longer term, provision of at least one additional cricket ground.	<i>Priority sites for qualitative issues:</i> Darlington RA, Haughton CC <i>Creation of NTP to increase capacity:</i> Darlington Rockcliffe Park (but all sites would benefit) <i>Additional Grounds</i> Additional capacity to support Rockcliffe Park CC in particular, but requirement for additional capacity to enable cricket growth will be critical.	Linking with C2 and C3, improve quality to enhance capacity at sites currently rated standard / poor (prioritising Darlington RA and Haughton CC as this is where pressures exist) Following qualitative improvements, work with clubs and leagues to introduce use of non turf wickets (on the square) in order to maximise capacity across the season. Deliver additional capacity through either; - Additional ground adjacent to existing at Rockcliffe Park - New provision at strategic housing site	Durham Cricket Board / ECB / Clubs	Medium to long term	- Evidence of improved square quality (measured by PitchPower) - Number of clubs benefitting from NTP - Creation of additional cricket ground
Cricket 7 (C7)	SO8	Ensure all clubs have access to appropriate off field training facilities to	All clubs in Darlington require improved training facilities; Middleton St George	Support clubs in the development of appropriate facilities.	Durham Cricket Board / ECB / Clubs.		- Each club benefitting from off field training provision - Each club having access to on site training provision

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
		enhance club sustainability and improve overall performance. Facilities provided should be proportional to the scale of the club but may include; - Artificial training nets - Off field NTP	(permanent off square training) - Haughton CC (permanent off square training) - Darlington RA (permanent off square training) - Darlington CC – seeking additional non turf options - Rockcliffe Park (Turf practice facilities) - Cockerton CC – no off field training				Successful funding applications
Tennis 1 (T1)	SO1	Protect existing tennis courts to ensure that the amount of courts is adequate to meet current and projected future demand. To ensure sustainability of existing stock, seek to maximise use of these facilities (see Tennis 2 – 5)	Protection - all existing functional sites.	- Ensure the list in the strategy document is monitored. - Include appropriate policy within the Local Plan to protect all existing active sites/facilities within the local plan for tennis.	DBC	Ongoing	- Inclusion of relevant policy - Protection of sites - Up to date list maintained of facilities

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
Tennis 2 (T2)	SO4, SO8	Support grass roots tennis across Darlington through the provision of public tennis courts that are fit for purpose. Sites functioning as parks should offer: • High quality and attractive facilities • Consideration should be given to the installation of Lawn Tennis Association customer journey Public courts would also benefit from the installation of floodlighting to extend availability.	All three parks sites require upgrade and improvement; • Brinkburn Dene • Stanhope Park • South Park	• Prioritise the refurbishment of public courts – further discussions should be held with the LTA to establish whether there is an opportunity to work together. • Investigate whether LTA booking systems could be integrated within the public infrastructure – these include improved booking procedures and gate access. This may involve reviewing the existing policy of free open access – it is suggested that a pilot project on one of the three sites is undertaken to explore this.	LTA / DBC/.	Short Term	• Meeting with LTA • Implementation of pilot project • Public tennis courts refurbished
Tennis 3 (T3)	SO2, SO3, SO8	Protect school courts and ensure that they offer a clear prospect for community use by ensuring that quality is adequate and that booking processes are clear.	Longer term, facilities on school sites will be an essential part of the tennis infrastructure if supply is to meet	• Linking with priorities relating to secured community use for other sports, work with schools to ensure	LTA / DBC/ Schools.	Short Term	• Meeting with key schools – The Education Village, Longfield Academy

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
		At school sites where community use is available; - Ensure that facilities remain of appropriate quality – eg through regular programmes of resurfacing, deep cleaning etc - Ensure that appropriate ancillary facilities are available (changing, - Work with schools to maximise the efficiency of booking systems	demand. If potential demand is maximised, all schools will be required. Key priorities are The Education Village and Longfield Academy - both have floodlights and therefore offer significant opportunity to meet community as well as curricular need. The Education Village is located on the other side of town to the majority of courts and therefore offers potential to provide tennis to a different group of residents than is currently effectively served.	that community access to tennis courts is secured Work with schools to improve booking systems for existing courts - the LTA programme now includes support for schools with gate access / implementation of online technology to support community use. This scheme could be invaluable in improving the community tennis offer at school sites Support schools where required to ensure that regular maintenance works are required out to tennis courts to ensure that the quality of facilities is retained			- Links developed between schools and LTA - Improved customer journey process - Increased use of school sites
Tennis 4 (T4)	SO10, SO4, SO5, SO7, SO8	Support clubs in the improvement of facilities where issues have been identified. Both clubs should have access to; courts of an appropriate standard; and	- New Blackwell LTC - Wellfield LTC - Venue for indoor courts tbc	Work alongside clubs to provide floodlighting on all courts at both sites to improve capacity Work with clubs and schools to identify a	LTA / Clubs / DBC	Short term	- Floodlighting at club sites - Meetings with interested schools to explore indoor tennis potential

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
		- adequate pavilion (including toilets) and shelter. Both clubs also require access to additional capacity. Key priorities to address this are; - Wellfield TC – floodlighting on all courts - New Blackwell TC – floodlighting on remainder of courts For both clubs, access to additional indoor / covered courts is required and the delivery of a venue containing covered courts in Darlington is a priority.		location to provide covered tennis courts (which could also be accessed by the clubs) – this is a key priority for The LTA Polam Hall School are understood to have expressed an initial interest in this opportunity and are well located to support New Blackwell LTC.			Delivery of indoor / covered tennis facilities
Tennis 5 (T4)	SO3, SO8, S10	Increase marketing and promotional activity for tennis across the borough linking with school and club sites and promoting the availability of public venues. This should include joint working between the Borough Council and the LTA. The key priorities should be: - Maximise signage of tennis courts - Provide clear and consistent information about the use of courts and how to book – this information should be clearly available on site, and ideally online - Support improvements to the customer journey where possible (for example online booking / gate access technology etc)	All sites.	Work alongside the LTA to improve marketing and promotion, using the LTA data to guide the target audience.	LTA / DBC / Schools / Clubs	Medium Term	- Meeting with LTA to explore opportunities - Delivery of relevant initiatives to increase awareness - Increased participation in tennis - Increased use of facilities

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
Tennis 6 (T5)	SO8	Monitor the increasing popularity of padel, and investigate opportunities to deliver additional padel courts if demand grows rapidly and unmet demand is identified	Modelling suggests that there is no immediate requirement for additional padel courts in Darlington	Monitor demand for Padel across and support the creation of a Padel court should demand arise (and where this is not to the detriment of tennis).	LTA	Ongoing	- Understanding of demand for padel in area and the degree to which this is met - Delivery of additional facilities if need is identified
Bowls 1 (BG1)	SO1	Protect existing active bowling greens. Consultation demonstrates that local access to bowling greens is a key determinant of participation.	All sites. There are concerns about the future of North Lodge Park	Ensure list in strategy is kept up to date Include appropriate policy in Local Plan to protect all existing active sites and support enhancement of existing facilities.	DBC	Ongoing	- Inclusion of relevant policy - Protection of sites - Up to date list maintained of playing field provision
Bowls 2 (BG2)	SO6, SO7, SO10	Promote the importance of effective maintenance regimes and support clubs in obtaining and implementing external grounds maintenance advice for their greens, as well as obtaining appropriate machinery to undertake the required tasks. Maintenance (and particularly out of season maintenance) was identified as the key priority for improvement across greens in Darlington.	All sites.	Promote sustainability at bowling greens by; - Signposting clubs to the help that is available on green maintenance / management - Signposting clubs to support and training for volunteers - Improving knowledge sharing and joint working	DBC / Bowls Development Alliance	Medium	- Implementation of tailored maintenance schedules for key sites through work alongside providers – evidence of improved maintenance regimes - Improved green quality – ideally all greens to good quality - Successful funding

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
				• Provide regular training and guidance events for the bowls clubs on the management and maintenance of facilities. • Promotion of succession planning - ensure that training targets both existing maintenance teams and other club members to maximise succession planning, enhance knowledge and reduce reliance on small numbers of volunteers • Supporting clubs in the compilation of funding bids for machinery / external funding.			• applications Evidence of succession planning • Clubs reporting access to appropriate machinery

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
Bowls 3 (BG3)	SO4, SO6, SO7	Support enhancements/upgrades to existing greens where there is evidence that the playing experience is currently impacted and where improvements would lead to increased community use and help to achieve financial sustainability by increasing membership. All bowling greens should include access to; - A green of appropriate standard - Adequate pavilion (including toilets) and shelter.	Key priorities: - North Lodge Park – maintenance (see BG2, accessible toilet) - Darlington RA –maintenance (see BG2, pavilion, irrigation system) - Middleton St George (maintenance, see BG2, pavilion)	Quality issues may be impacted / caused by poor maintenance regimes and this should be eliminated first (see Bowls 2). Professional assessments should be undertaken in order to ascertain the work required. Where clubs require qualitative improvements but there is not adequate capital, support clubs in the compilation of funding bids and work alongside the committee to identify other means of generating income.	WFC / Clubs	Long term	- Improved green quality – ideally all greens to good quality - Successful funding applications
Bowls 4 (BG4)	SO10	Support clubs to proactively increase participation and membership. This should include work to remove key barriers to participation in the sport including: - Poor marketing and a lack of proactive promotion resulting in lack of awareness - Lack of online presence	Clubs where membership numbers are currently lower and would benefit from immediate support are; North Park (immediate support required as membership is 10)	Work alongside the Darlington Park Bowls Association and / or relevant clubs to support club development initiatives and provide advice and guidance to stimulate improvement. Sustainability at clubs should be monitored – sites with less than 20 members are	Bowls Alliance / Darlington Park Bowls Association / DBC		- Initial meeting with roles representatives to identify support that is required - Evidence of marketing and promotion for bowls - Successful participation initiatives launched - Increase in participation

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
			North Lodge Park Both of the above are run by Darlington Park Bowls Association. Darlington RA and Middleton St George have higher memberships but would still benefit from increases to support sustainability.	unsustainable and immediate support will be required to increase membership.			
Bowls 5 (BG5)	SO8	Monitor capacity / membership at existing bowling greens. There is currently no clear requirement for new greens.		Monitor club membership annually in order to ensure that there remains scope for growth. Ensure that the provision of bowling greens in new development is considered if membership numbers of existing greens increase and are close to capacity.	DBC	Ongoing	- Up to date understanding of participation - Successful delivery of new green if demand identified
Hockey 1 (H1)	SO1	Ensure that existing sand based AGP at Carmel College is protected for use by hockey club	Carmel College	Work alongside Carmel College to ensure the ongoing provision of a pitch of appropriate surface for hockey.	EH / DBC / Carmel College / Club	Ongoing	- Retention of sand based surface - Prioritisation of hockey - Increasing participation

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
				Ensure the proper protection of the hockey surface through the planning process -seek to remove permitted development rights / apply planning conditions to ensure that full consultation with relevant NGBs must be carried out prior to any change in pitch surface Ensure ongoing access to appropriate hours for the hockey club in line with the community use agreement.			
Hockey 2 (H2)	SO4, SO5, SO6	Ensure ongoing investment into pitch quality across the lifespan of the pitch to ensure that facility quality is maximised and to maintain the longevity of the surface. This includes; - Ensuring appropriate regular maintenance is carried out - Timely resurface of the carpet	Carmel College	Continue to follow recommended maintenance programmes to maximise pitch quality In anticipation of the need to replace the pitch surface over this strategy period, start the engagement and preparation now to ensure timely resurface and continuity of provision	EH / DBC / Carmel College / Club	Ongoing / resurface long term	- Tailored maintenance plan that is adhered to - Timely resurface of carpet

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
Hockey 3	SO4, SO5, SO6	Continue to work in partnership to ensure that the club are able to access a high quality facility and that any issues with the facility are addressed swiftly. It should be ensured that hockey continues to be prioritised on this facility.	Carmel College	Continue regular partnership meetings	EH / DBC / Carmel College / Club		Regular meetings between group
Rugby Union 1 (RU1)	SO1	Ensure that both rugby clubs have access to sufficient facilities in the first instance by protecting existing sites and ensuring that any loss of pitches is only supported where an equivalent or better in terms of capacity is provided.	- Darlington RFC - Darlington Mowden Park	Ensure appropriate policy is included within Local Plan to protect (and support enhancement) of all existing rugby union sites. Loss of playing fields should only be permitted where a policy compliant solution is presented.	DBC	Ongoing	- Inclusion of relevant policy - Protection of sites - Up to date list maintained of playing field provision
Rugby Union 2 (RU2)	SO8, SO4, SO5, SO7	Create additional capacity to support both clubs by; - Focusing on improvements to pitch quality, in the first instance through investment into maintenance. This should be guided by the PitchPower assessments that have been undertaken on both sites - Providing access to WR compliant 3G AGP (through the delivery of one to	- Darlington RFC / Blackwell Meadows - Darlington Mowden Park	Work with both clubs to implement recommendations of PitchPower assessments – this is a priority for both clubs given the quality issues experienced at both sites, and the impact that this has been demonstrated to have on capacity.	RFU / Clubs DBC	Short to medium term	- Improved maintenance regimes - Investment into pitch quality - Delivery of 1 – 2 new 3G AGPs with rugby surface - Provision of additional floodlights (DRFC) - Additional capacity created (both)

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
		two new rugby compatible pitches – see 3G pitch recommendations - Providing additional floodlighting on 2 additional pitches at Darlington RFC (subject to above delivery of 3G AGP provision) - Longer term (and if 3G AGP are not provided), explore opportunities to provide additional grass rugby pitches at the existing club bases (through site extensions).		In line with recommendation 3G AGP 1, work alongside DBC, Football Foundation and DCFA to finalise the appropriate locations for new 3G AGP Support Darlington RFC to obtain additional floodlights for 2 additional pitches (subject to 3G AGP strategy)			
Rugby Union 3 (RU3)	SO5, SO7	Social facilities and appropriate changing provision are a key component of a successful rugby club. Ensure that associated ancillary provision meets with club need to maximise sustainability and facilitate the development of women and girls rugby.	Both clubs confirm a requirement for works to ancillary provision - Darlington RFC – upgrade required - Darlington Mowden Park – additional facilities required	Work with both clubs to deliver the ancillary facilities required to support club growth	RFU / Club	Medium to long term	- Upgraded ancillary provision at both sites - Successful funding applications

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
3G AGP 1	SO8	Provide at least three additional 3G AGPs in Darlington to meet current demand for rugby union and football. Together, these facilities should deliver required access to 3G AGP for rugby union clubs (minimum 11 hours) and the remainder football. Access to peak time slots should be balanced between sports to ensure a fair and even distribution (regardless of whether the site is football or rugby led). Longer term, an additional 3G AGP may be required – this will be dependent on the degree to which football and rugby union growth is delivered	Three sites to be chosen from the following locations; Central Area Eastbourne Sports Complex South Area Darlington RA Hurworth School Darlington Mowden Park (<i>this site is a priority site for the RFU</i>) Darlington RFC / Blackwell Meadows Explore the option of at least one of the pitches including a rugby compliant service (potentially two depending on location).	Working with potential providers, identify three deliverable locations. Work will include; • Identification of key user partners • Physical feasibility of pitch • Management and maintenance arrangements • Funding availability Ensure agreement is reached on balance of usage as part of the project development process	Site owners / DBC / DCFA / RFU / FF	2 short term, 1 medium to long term	• 3x new 3G AGP provided
3G AGP 2	SO4	Ensure that quality of existing 3G AGPs is retained through regular inspections and completion of any works required for	Longfield Academy – scheduled for surface	Work alongside 3G AGP providers to ensure that regular inspections are	FF / DCFA / DBC	Short term and ongoing	• Short term refurbishment of pitch at Longfield

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
		ongoing inclusion on FA 3G Pitch Register.	replacement Summer 2026 All other existing 3G pitches are on Pitch Register at time of assessment report.	undertaken. Ensure that all 3G pitches are tested regularly to retain inclusion on 3G Pitch Register.			Academy • All pitches retained on FA pitch register
Football 1	SO1	Protect all football pitches through Local Plan policy to ensure that the existing capacity is protected, unless a proposal is brought forward that meets NPPF requirements. Any sites not required will be referenced in the site by site action plan	All playing fields.	Incorporate appropriate policy in Local Plan protecting all existing playing fields. Loss of playing fields should only be permitted where a policy compliant solution is presented.	• DBC	• Ongoing	• Inclusion of relevant policy • Protection of sites • Up to date list maintained of playing field provision
Football 2	SO2, SO3,	Protect existing security of tenure through; • timely and ongoing negotiation to maintain existing secure community use agreements. This should include ensuring that agreements are both delivered as agreed and renewed where required • timely discussions with landowners to ensure lease agreements are renewed where appropriate.	<i>Current Valuable community use agreements that should be retained -</i> Longfield Academy, Hummersknott Academy, Carmel College, The Education Village <i>Community Use Agreements not currently enacted</i> Wyvern Academy <i>Secure community use to following</i>	• Engage with identified key schools on a regular basis to ensure continuity of access and retain long term commitment to community use. These facilities are essential to maintaining adequate capacity within the infrastructure. • Monitor existing CUA and work	FF/ DCFA / DBC	Short term	• Meeting with Wyvern Academy to explore access to both Staindrop Road and school grounds and ensure existing CUA is enacted • Meeting with Mount Pleasant School • CUAs are in place, kept up to date and are enforced through planning conditions

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
			<i>unsecured venues;</i> Mount Pleasant Primary School	alongside clubs / schools to address issues where these arise • Seek to negotiate formal community access agreements to pitch sites where access is currently unsecured to ensure commitment to long term use • Ensure any new schools are developed with a CUA that includes access to playing fields			
Football 3	SO8, SO4, SO5, SO6, SO7, SO10	Improve capacity for football through the following mechanisms; • Maximising the use of venues that are available but not currently used • Securing community use of key venues where use is not currently available (see football 2) • Providing access to at least 3 new 3G AGPs (linked with rugby) – See recommendation 3G AGP 1	<i>Key venues with no existing community use</i> Carmel College, Staindrop Road <i>Venues to secure community use</i> Wyvern Academy, QE Sixth Form	• Work with owners / managers of venues with little use to explore potential barriers to use and seek to relocate clubs • Engage with identified venues to negotiate community access agreements / secure delivery of existing agreements If	DBC / DCFA / Football Foundation	Short, medium and long term	• Meeting with Wyvern Academy, QE Sixth Form • Delivery of new 3G AGP • Evidence of quality improvement (and no remaining poor pitches) • Provision of new football hub site

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
		- Improving quality of existing poor quality sites - Provision of new grass multi pitch site through on site provision in strategic housing development (or pooling of contributions from smaller development). This should be in the form of a multi pitch hub site (rather than small single pitch facilities). This links with recommendation to use SE calculator to understand impact of growth. Work will be required to determine how this is delivered and how any proposed facilities will be managed	<i>Sites where quality is impacting capacity and are therefore priority</i> St Aidans School Teesside Airport (note both of the above sites have been offered GPMF grants in July 2026) <i>New Football Hub</i> Deliver new multi pitch football hub on strategic development site.	successful, engage with clubs to maximise the use of these venues. - In line with recommendation 3G AGP 1, establish a task group to deliver the required 3G pitch provision - Work with clubs to implement the recommendations of PitchPower assessments to improve quality. In line with Football 4, this may involve capital investment if issues are not addressed through adjustments to maintenance. GPMF may be available for some sites to support this work - Proactively work with developers to deliver new grass pitch football hub on strategic development site. This should include			

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
				agreement of appropriate management / maintenance arrangements.			
Football 4	SO4, SO6, SO7	Retain and further improve pitch quality by; - Retaining quality of all pitches that are currently rated as good. - Improving pitches identified as poor to a minimum standard rating - Seeking to achieve a good rating on all grass pitches over the strategy period – sites should be prioritised where qualitative improvements will help to address overlay The above should be driven through the use of the FF Pitch Power tool by all clubs and pitch providers.	<i>Key priority for investment – poor quality larger sites:</i> St Aidans C of E Academy, Teesside Airport (note both of the above sites have been offered GPMF grants in July 2026) <i>Sites impacting the delivery of adult football;</i> Red Hall Community Centre, St George Playing Field (note site receiving GPMF grants from July 2026) Tommy Crooks Park, Springfield, Skerne Park Community Centre, North Park, <i>Exploration of funding</i>	- Work with clubs / providers to promote use of PitchPower and then subsequent access to maintenance improvement support - Proactively support clubs and providers at multi sports sites to tailor their maintenance to ensure that capacity and quality for both the summer and winter sports is maintained - Regularly review maintenance procedures on Council sites to ensure fit for purpose - Active monitor available funding sources and	Football Foundation (FF)/ DCFA / DBC.	Medium Term	- Commission and renewal of PitchPower Assessments - Retention of quality on existing facilities - Tailored maintenance schedules for key sites through work alongside providers - Improved pitch quality – to include no poor pitches and higher proportion of good pitches - Successful funding applications

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
			<i>opportunities</i> – Staindrop Road (Home Advantage Fund)	identify and support eligible organisations to access funding to improve grass pitches, e.g. FF Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund, Home Advantage Fund			
Football 5	SO4, SO7	Support capital investment into improvements where this is still required following maintenance improvements, and where improvements are necessary to meet with league standards / needed to ensure that play can continue. This may include drainage works, which was identified as an ongoing issue at several sites.	To be determined through implementation of Football 3	Work in partnership provider / users to identify detailed improvements required through use of PitchPower etc. Provide support and guidance to providers / clubs in the submission of external funding bids. Seek to direct S106 funding towards pitch / facility quality improvements where facilities requiring investment are located within catchment of new development.	Football Foundation (FF)/ DCFA / DBC.	Ongoing	- Commission and renewal of PitchPower Assessments - Retention of quality on existing facilities - Tailored maintenance schedules for key sites through work alongside providers - Improved pitch quality – to include no poor pitches and higher proportion of good pitches - Successful funding applications
Football 6	SO5	Support improvement to ancillary facilities to ensure all sites have a facility of adequate standard (toilets / electricity /	Darlington RA – ancillary facilities limited and in poor condition – this	Provide support and guidance to clubs / in the submission of funding bids. This should include the	FF/ DCFA / DBC.	Medium term	- Improved ancillary provision - All sites offering appropriate

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
		running water / changing rooms / basic kitchen) where these are required. Facilities serving junior teams should offer a minimum of toilets of appropriate standard. Full changing accommodation is required where senior football and older youth age groups are hosted. Where clubs are delivering football for women / girls, ensure that sites have sufficient ancillary facilities to accommodate this.	is a priority project that would deliver multi sport benefits (club have expressed an interest in Howden's Kitchen Fund programme). • Blackwell Meadows – access to facilities for community football teams (requires either new access arrangements or new facilities) • Priors Hurworth House (existing facilities in poor condition) • Saint George Playing Fields – no ancillary facilities provided • Teesside Airport – restricted facilities – portaloo only	identification of opportunities for funding. Direct S106 funding towards ancillary provision where facilities are located in the catchment of new development.			provision • Successful funding applications

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
			- Tommy Crooks Park – no facilities - Springfield – no facilities - Mount Pleasant Primary School – no facilities - Staindrop Road – parking / ancillary provision				
Athletics 1	SO1	Protect the existing track at Eastbourne Sports Complex	Eastbourne Sports Complex	Ensure protection of all existing athletics sites through local plan policies.	DBC	Ongoing	- Inclusion of relevant policy - Protection of sites - Up to date list maintained of provision
Athletics 2	SO4	Ensure the track remains <i>fit for purpose</i> by undertaking relevant qualitative upgrades where necessary, using the Track Mark accreditation as a basis for evaluation. This should include investment in the issues identified as currently impacting club participation – high jump mat, throws cage	Eastbourne Sports Complex	Work alongside club to deliver required upgrades.	Clubs / DBC / EA	Short	- Delivery of identified upgrades - Retention of Trackmark certification
Athletics 3	SO10	Support the growth of athletics in Darlington by; - working alongside the clubs to bring competition back to Darlington - engaging with England Athletic programmes now running in the north	Eastbourne Sports Complex	Work with England Athletics and local clubs to create a positive relationship between users and providers. This may include a review of access	Clubs / DBC / EA	Medium - Long term	- Meetings and joint working with athletics clubs - Engagement with England Athletics

Sport	Link to Objectives	Recommendation	Relevant Sites	Key Actions	Responsibilities	Timeframe	Measures of Success
		east to increase participation in Darlington. These include programmes to improve school club links and U12 competition		arrangements. Explore opportunities with England Hockey to engage with new programmes to develop athletics in Darlington			- Return of competition to Darlington - Evidence of increased participation
Athletics 4	SO4, SO6	Seek to provide an informal athletics track in the borough to meet recreational demand – the existing poor quality cinder track at Longfield Academy would provide an opportunity to provide this	Longfield Academy	Work with Longfield Academy to explore opportunities to provide a new facility that is available to both the school and community. This could include consideration of New Gen facilities, which include: PlayTrack CompactTrack, ActiveTrack MiniTrack.	DBC / EA	Long term	- Meeting with Longfield Academy - Delivery of new facility
Athletics 5	SO9	Building on the growing participation in informal athletics in Darlington, seek to promote the creation of informal opportunities for recreation, including athletics, within new housing development in Darlington	New housing development	Work with developers to deliver active environments within site masterplans. Provide guidance at an early stage to ensure that physical activity is incorporated into development	DBC / EA	Ongoing	Delivery of active environments within new development

Sport	Link to Strategic Objectives	Recommendation	Justification	Relevant Sites and Key Actions	Lead Partner	Measures of Success
Sports Halls 1	SO1 (Protect)	1 Resist the loss of any sports hall sites unless replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location.	All sports hall sites are well used and well located to meet current and future demands across Darlington The impact of any closures alongside growth would impact on the supply and demand balance.	All Sports Halls.	Darlington Planning / Leisure	Retention of existing sports hall sites
Sports Halls 2	SO1, SO2 and SO3 (Protect)	2 Protect existing access to sports hall on education sites. Seek investment to protect access and usage. Seek to enhance access and technical design to meet club and specialist sport use.	Existing school sites are central to the provision for hall sports in Darlington and maintaining the supply and demand balance. The meet challenges re continuity of club use and ensuring halls are fit for purpose to meet specialist sport needs. Loss of these facilities would impact on overall supply and demand balance.	All education sites.	Darlington Planning / Leisure	- Access to sports halls on school sites to be protected and enhanced through investment - Delivery of specialist club use and needs.

			Ensure that existing community use agreements are delivered and renewed.				CUAs are in place, kept up to date and are enforced through planning conditions
Sports Halls 3	SO4, SO5, SO6 and SO7 (Enhance)	3	Support enhancements /upgrades to the existing sports hall infrastructure.	The quality of facility provision is a key priority for Darlington clubs. Enhancing specialist provision and club use in the existing network is important.	All sites	Darlington Leisure	Improved facility quality to meet club and NGB needs
Sports Halls 4	SO4 and SO9 (Enhance and Provide)	4	Seek investment to the sports hall infrastructure from new developments. Seek investment to improve the quality and capacity at the key sports hall sites in line with the application of Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator tool. Provide new provision to meet identified gaps if appropriate following feasibility work and consideration of supply and demand balance at the time.	Supply and demand clearly illustrates that there will be impacts of the projected growth that will require financial contributions. This will be exacerbated if the supply changes i.e. any of the current sports halls close. Any new provision should focus on specialist provision and smaller flexible spaces to deliver health and physical activity programmes in localities. There is some justification for additional large indoor space to meet specialist sport needs, of which netball and tennis have key needs, along with basketball and table tennis. Whether there are opportunities for a multi-sport indoor solution should be explored.	All sports hall sites Feasibility on indoor specialist sports provision Based on the catchment of proposed developments in line with CIL	Darlington Leisure / Darlington Planning	Developer contributions secured towards the sports hall facility infrastructure enhancements

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Sports	Link to Strategic Objectives	Recommendation	Justification	Relevant Sites and Key Actions	Lead Partner	Measures of Success
Swimming Pools 1	SO1 (Protect)	1 Resist the loss of any swimming pool sites unless replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location.	All Swimming pool sites are well used and well located to meet current and future demands across Darlington. The impact of any closures alongside growth would impact on the supply and demand balance.	All Swimming Pools.	Darlington Planning / Leisure	Retention of existing pool sites
Swimming Pools 2	SO1, SO2 and SO3 (Protect)	2 Protect existing access to swimming pools on education sites. Seek investment to protect access and usage.	Existing school sites are central to the provision for swimming in Darlington and maintaining the supply and demand balance. Loss of these facilities would impact on overall supply and demand balance.	All sites.	Bassetlaw Planning / Leisure	Access to swimming pools on school sites to be protected and enhanced through

			Ensure that existing community use agreements are delivered and renewed.				investment
Swimming Pools 3	SO4, SO5, SO6 and SO7 (Enhance)	3	Support enhancements /upgrades to the existing swimming facility infra-structure, particularly the Dolphin Centre.	Dolphin Centre is the key swimming facility, which will come under increasing pressure and will require on-going investment. The quality of facility provision is a key priority.	Dolphin Centre.	Darlington Leisure	- CUAs are in place, kept up to date and are enforced through planning conditions - Improved facility quality
Swimming Pools 4	SO4 and SO9 (Enhance and Provide)	4	Seek investment to the swimming pool infra-structure from new developments. Seek investment to improve the quality and capacity at the key swimming pool sites in line with the application of Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator tool. Provide new provision to meet identified gaps if appropriate following consideration of supply	Supply and demand clearly illustrates that there will be impacts of the projected growth that will require financial contributions. This will be exacerbated if the supply changes i.e. any of the current pools close.	All swimming pool sites Based on the catchment of proposed developments in line with CIL	Darlington Leisure / Darlington Planning	Developer contributions secured towards swimming pool facility infra-structure enhancements



			and demand balance at the time.				
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Site Specific Action Plan

- 3.26 The sport specific action plan therefore highlighted a series of key priorities and issues that will need to be addressed if the sporting infrastructure in Darlington is to continue to meet demand.
- 3.27 The key short term priorities include;
- Provision of at least 3 new 3G AGPs to serve football and rugby union clubs
 - Improvement of capacity for cricket, through a mixture of qualitative investment, training facilities and NTP
 - Investment into qualitative improvements at Darlington RFC and Darlington Modwen Park RFC, alongside additional floodlighting at Darlington RFC
 - Early discussions to plan the refurbishment of the existing sand based AGP at Carmel College
 - Investment to improve access arrangements and quality of parks tennis courts
 - Support to bowls clubs to increase participation and to enhance maintenance procedures
 - Investment to address issues with athletics track at Eastbourne Sports Complex
 - Continued investment in the existing sports hall and swimming pool stock, with a focus on the Dolphin Centre.
- 3.28 Building on the sport specific recommendations and action plan set out in previous pages, a site specific summary of the recommendations is provided overleaf in Table 3.2. This summarises the actions that are required at each site.

Table 3.2 - Site by Site Action List

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
Football	Bishopton Redmarshall CE Primary School	TS21 1HD	General grass playing field	n/a	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use
Football	Carmel College	DL3 8RW	3 adult 11v11	Standard	School site with significant spare capacity at peak time - no existing community users on the site despite availability. Unsecured for community use.	Protect for curricular use. Secure community use agreement for football and work to place a club at the site.
Hockey	Carmel College	DL3 8RW	Full size sand based AGP	Standard	Sand based AGP used exclusively for hockey. Scope to increase activity. Likely to require surface upgrade within lifespan of strategy	Protect sand based surface to ensure continuity for hockey. Start discussions with College to ensure timely upgrade of surface as well as to explore opportunities to increase usage of pitch, whilst retaining use for hockey.
Cricket	Cockerton CC	DL3 9AB	Grass cricket square (12 strips)	Poor to standard	Cricket ground accommodating senior male teams. Drainage issues require addressing and ancillary facilities also need update.	Protect, investment into pitch maintenance to improve capacity using PitchPower as guide, club may also require support with maintenance equipment. Improvement of ancillary provision and require off field training provision
Football	Croft Working Mens Club	DL2 2DA	Disused	n/a	Disused site, used as camping / caravan site	Previously accommodated adult 11v11 pitch. Site has no role to play in meeting current demand, but should be protected unless an NPPF policy compliant solution is brought forward.
Cricket	Darlington CC	DL1 5JD	Grass cricket square (23 strips)	Good	High quality cricket ground accommodating large club. Large square means that activity can just be accommodated, although there	Protect, maintenance of existing quality. Investment into training facilities

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
					are increasing demands at the site. Club seeking additional training capacity and are also trying to improve site sustainability.	
Football	Darlington Education Village	DL1 2AN	2 adult 11v11, 3 youth 11v11, 1 9v9, 1 7v7	Standard (low)	Standard quality site which is important for community as well as curricular use. No remaining capacity on 9v9 or youth 11v11	Protect, seek to further improve quality to good (through improved maintenance in the first instance) – this could be delivered by exploring application to GPMF
3G AGP	Darlington Education Village	DL1 2AN	Small size 3G	Good	Good quality small 3G AGP that is well used for training. Limited remaining capacity	Protect, ensure appropriate maintenance and timely resurfacing. Seek to register pitch on 3G Register to enable match play.
Tennis	Darlington Education Village	DL1 2AN	3 courts	Standard	Standard quality tennis courts available for hire. Well located in an area with more limited alternative tennis provision	Protect. Proactively work to increase use and explore opportunities with LTA to improve court booking systems. Improve marketing and promotion of courts
Rugby Union	Darlington Mowden Park RFC	DL2 1DL	3 rugby union pitches (all floodlit), grassed mini rugby area	Main pitch and pitch 2 basic, pitch 1 poor	Site capacity restricted by limited quality of existing pitches. Ancillary provision also requires upgrade to provide adequate facilities for number of teams. Overplay evident, particularly once requirement to accommodate training is taken into account.	Protect, investment into pitch maintenance to improve site capacity. Explore potential for provision of WR compliant 3G AGP (either on site or at alternative venue) to support training requirements of club. Investment into ancillary facility improvement
Bowls	Darlington Railway Athletic	DL3 9LF	1 bowling green	Standard	Part of larger sports club, standard quality green but poor watering system. Inadequate clubhouse / toilet facilities. Average membership numbers but would benefit from increase.	Protect, support club to increase membership numbers. Invest in maintenance to improve quality, improve ancillary provision

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
Cricket	Darlington Railway Athletic Cc	DL3 9LF	Grass cricket square (15 strips)	Standard	Well used cricket ground that requires upgrade to both pitch and ancillary provision. Insufficient capacity to meet demand	Protect, investment into pitch maintenance to improve capacity using PitchPower as guide. Improvement of ancillary provision. Support provision of non turf training facilities. Explore potential for provision of 3G AGP (either on site or at alternative venue) to support training requirements of club
Football	Darlington Railway Athletic Sports And Social Club	DL3 9LF	1 adult 11v11, 3 7v7 and 5 5v5	Standard	Some spare capacity to accommodate more play, although large numbers of club teams play elsewhere due to limited provision. Barrired 11v11 pitch. Strong availability of 7v7 and 5v5 pitches due to use of cricket outfield.	Protect, seek to improve quality of both grass playing fields (focusing firstly on maintenance) but also ancillary provision. Explore potential as location for future 3G AGP development
Rugby Union	Darlington RFC / Blackwell Meadows	DL1 5NR	5 rugby union pitches (one floodlit), grassed mini rugby area	Stadia pitch good, pitch 1 basic, pitch 2 basic, pitch 3 basic, pitch 4 poor.	Site capacity restricted by limited quality of existing pitches, one pitch is currently out of use due to poor quality. Ancillary provision also requires upgrade to provide adequate facilities for number of teams. Overplay evident, particularly once requirement to accommodate training is taken into account.	Protect, investment into pitch maintenance to improve site capacity. Explore potential for provision of WR compliant 3G AGP (either on site or at alternative venue) to support training requirements of club. Additional floodlighting to increase on site training capacity. Investment into ancillary facility improvement
Football	Darlington RFC / Blackwell Meadows	DL1 5NR	1 adult 11v11 plus 2 other 11v11, 2 9v9, 17v7 and 2 5v5	Good	Main pitch shared with rugby and used exclusively for football by Darlington FC. Community pitches are heavily used, with only the 9v9 and 5v5 offering spare capacity at peak time. Lack of changing facilities to support community pitches is a key issue on this site.	Protect, provide ancillary facilities to support community pitches. Site is potential location for WR compliant 3G AGP (likely on rugby union pitch 5 rather than football)

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
Football	Eastbourne Sports Complex	DL1 1LJ	1 adult 11v11, 1 youth 11v11, 1 9v9, 1 7v7, 1 5v5	Good	Important hub site, no spare capacity at peak time on youth 11v11, 9v9 or 7v7 pitches. Good quality provision	Protect, maintain quality. Explore as potential location for additional 3G AGP to form triple 3G AGP hub site.
3G AGP	Eastbourne Sports Complex	DL1 1LJ	Full size 3G AGP	Good	Good quality 3G AGP on hub site that is used to capacity	Protect, ensure registration on FF 3G AGP register is retained through appropriate maintenance and timely resurfacing
3G AGP	Eastbourne Sports Complex	DL1 1LJ	Full size 3G AGP	Good	Second good quality 3G AGP on hub site that is used to capacity, meets FA requirements for NSL and WSL matches.	Protect, ensure registration on FF 3G AGP register is retained through appropriate maintenance and timely resurfacing
Bowls	Eastbourne Sports Complex	DL1 1LJ	1 bowling green	Standard	Green in standard condition, although some bare patches. Declining membership that would benefit from increase.	Protect, support club to increase membership numbers. Invest in maintenance to improve quality
Athletics	Eastbourne Sports Complex	DL1 1LJ	400m 8 lane synthetic athletics track	Good	Newly refurbished athletics track, requires improvement to throws and jumps facilities. TrackMark accredited (but not for competition). Desire to bring back competition to Darlington	Protection, investment into throw and jump facility, longer term delivery of seating following partnership working with clubs to deliver competitions
Football	Federation Of Abbey Schools	DL3 8NN	1 Youth 11v11	n/a	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use. Secure community use agreement
Football	Gurney Pease Academy	DL1 2NG	2 7v7	Standard	School site with spare capacity - no existing community users	Protect for curricular use. Secure community use agreement
Cricket	Haughton Cricket Club	DL1 3JW	Grass cricket square (8 strips)	Standard	Overplayed cricket ground and club has unsecure tenure. Requires investment into both pitch and ancillary facility quality.	Protect (or obtain replacement provision in line with NPPF), secure lease. investment into pitch maintenance to improve capacity using PitchPower as guide. Improvement of ancillary provision.
Football	Heathfield Primary School	DL1 1EJ	1 7v7	standard	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use. Secure community use agreement

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
Football	Heighington C Of E Primary School	DL5 6PH	1 7v7	standard	School site previously also used by community (but no existing community use). Basic quality provision with no ancillary facilities, capacity to accommodate community use.	Protect for curricular use. Secure community use agreement. Location means site offers potential to accommodate additional club activity for Heighington JFC should demand arise
Football	Heighington Playing Fields	DL5 6PT	1 adult 11v11, 1 youth 11v11, 1 9v9	Good	Site managed by club. Pitch quality significantly improved and spare capacity on all pitches at peak time.	Protect, maintain pitch quality through ongoing maintenance procedures.
Football	Hummersknott Academy	DL3 8AR	2 adult 11v11, 1 youth 11v11, 1 9v9, 1 7v7 and 1 5v5	Good	High quality hub site, no spare capacity at peak time on youth 11v11 or 9v9	Protect, ensure high quality maintenance schedule is retained.
3G AGP	Hummersknott Academy	DL3 8AR	Full size 3G	Good	Good quality 3G AGP on hub site that is used to capacity	Protect, ensure registration on FF 3G AGP register is retained through appropriate maintenance and timely resurfacing
Rugby Union	Hummersknott Academy	DL3 8AR	1 rugby union pitch	Standard	Rugby union pitch, available but with no existing community use.	Protect for curricular use
Tennis	Hummersknott Academy	DL3 8AR	4 courts	Standard	Public access available, standard school tennis courts overmarked with netball	Protect. Proactively work to increase use and explore opportunities with LTA to improve court booking systems. Improve marketing and promotion of courts
Football	Hurworth Grange Community Centre	DL2 2BN	Generic playing field	Poor	Informal playing field only, historically provided formal playing field provision	Protect
Football	Hurworth School	DL2 2JG	2 adult 11v11 pitches	Good	Good quality well maintained playing fields. Limited community use, hence spare capacity at peak time and across the week	Protect, maintain quality and seek to increase community use. Explore potential as location for future 3G AGP development
Rugby Union	Hurworth School	DL2 2JG	1 rugby union pitch	Standard	Rugby union pitch, available but with no existing community use.	Protect for curricular use

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
Tennis	Hurworth School	DL2 2JG	2 courts	Standard	Overmarked tennis courts available for hire	Protect. Proactively work to increase use and explore opportunities with LTA to improve court booking systems. Improve marketing and promotion of courts
Football	Longfield Academy	DL3 0HT	4 adult, 1 youth 11v11, 1 9v9	Good	Hub site with extensive community use. No remaining capacity on 9v9 at peak time and all other pitches well used.	Protect, maintain high quality maintenance. Ensure timely refurbishment of 3G AGP.
3G AGP	Longfield Academy	DL3 0HT	Full size 3G	Standard to poor	3G AGP on hub site that is used to capacity	Protect. As of July 2026, pitch is no longer on FF 3G AGP register. Resurface required to reinstate pitch. Once resurfaced, ensure quality is retained through appropriate maintenance and timely resurfacing.
Rugby Union	Longfield Academy	DL3 0HT	3 rugby union pitch	Standard	Rugby union pitch, available but with no existing community use.	Protect for curricular use
Tennis	Longfield Academy	DL3 0HT	5 courts	Standard	Standard quality courts available for community use. Scope to increase use of facilities	Protect . Proactively work to increase use and explore opportunities with LTA to improve court booking systems. Improve marketing and promotion of courts. Potential location for indoor / covered courts
Athletics	Longfield Academy	DL3 0HT	400m cinder athletic track	Poor condition	Poor quality facility, little school use and no community use.	Opportunity to provide replacement track to support recreational athletics. Conversion to one of England Athletics NextGen tracks should be considered
Football	Middlesbrough Fc (Rockliffe Park)	DL2 2DU	8 adult 11v11	Good	High quality football hub supporting professional club	Protect
3G AGP	Middlesbrough FC (Rockliffe Park)	DL2 2DU	Full size 3G	Good	Private 3G AGP on Middlesbrough FC training venue. Not available for	Protect

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
					public use and assumed high quality	
Bowls	Middleton St George Bowls Club	DL2 1JQ	1 bowling green	Standard	Green requires reinstatement works, ancillary facilities require updating. Average membership numbers that would benefit from increase.	Protect, support club to increase membership numbers. Invest in maintenance to improve quality
Cricket	Middleton St George Cricket Club	DL2 1JF	Grass cricket square (12 strips)	Standard	Cricket ground accommodating senior male teams, limited spare capacity. Requires investment into into pitch improvements	Protect, investment into pitch maintenance to improve capacity using PitchPower as guide, club may also require support with maintenance equipment. Improvement of ancillary provision, provision of off square training facilities
Football	Mount Pleasant Primary School (Darlington)	DL3 9HE	1 7v7, 1 5v5	Standard (low)	Important venue for small club, currently unsecured. Poorly drained in parts and no ancillary facilities provided. Spare capacity to accommodate additional play	Protect, seek to secure community use. Pitch improvements required and would benefit from access to ancillary provision
Football	Mowden Infant School	DL3 9QG	1 7v7	n/a	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use
Football	Mowden Junior School	DL3 9DE	1 7v7	n/a	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use
Tennis	New Blackwell Tennis Club	DL3 8EQ	6 courts	Good	Well kept tidy site with good courts. Lack of covered courts restricts capacity and means there is no tennis in the case of inclement weather. Very limited remaining spare capacity	Protect, support club to provide floodlighting, and support club in finding access to covered courts. Maintain site quality
Bowls	North Lodge Park	DL3 6JX	1 bowling green	Standard	Managed by Parks Bowls Association. Standard quality green but with some improvements required. Small number of	Protect, support club to increase membership numbers. Invest in maintenance to improve quality

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
					members means that work to increase participation is a key priority	
Football	North Park	DL3 0YL	1 adult 11v11	Standard	Spare capacity to accommodate additional play, lack of ancillary provision impacts desirability	Protect, seek to improve quality (through improved maintenance in the first instance) to increase capacity.
Bowls	North Park	DL3 0YL	1 bowling green	Standard	Reasonable quality green but with some issues identified. Falling membership has now reached levels where club is at risk.	Protect, support club to increase membership numbers. Invest in maintenance to improve quality if sufficient members can be recruited to ensure green remains viable.
Football	Polam Hall School	DL1 5PA	1 adult 11v11	Standard	Spare capacity at peak time due to lack of community use. Scope to sustain additional play, although value limited as only single pitch available	Protect, secure community use and work with school to identify community user.
Rugby Union	Polam Hall School	DL1 5PA	1 rugby union pitch	Standard	Rugby union pitch, available but with no existing community use.	Protect for curricular use
Tennis	Polam Hall School	DL1 5PA	5 courts	Standard	Planning application approved for replacement provision, new high quality courts to be provided and community use will be secured	Protect, ensure community use is available, consider integration of LTA booking / access systems. Improve marketing and promotion of courts, potential location for indoor / covered courts
Football	Priory Hurworth House Playing Fields	DL2 2FU	1 Youth 11v11, 1 9v9, 1 7v7, 1 5v5	Good	Youth 11v11, 9v9 and 5v5 pitches have no remaining spare capacity at peak time. Important venue leased by club.	Protect, maintain quality and level of maintenance. Support club with works to improve ancillary provision
Football	Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College Playing Fields	DL3 8LR	3 adult 11v11	Standard (high)	Reserved for curricular use only.	Protect for curricular use, work with college to investigate potential to secure community use on the site.

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
Football	Red Hall Community Centre	DL1 2ST	General grass playing field	Poor	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use
Tennis	Redworth Hall Hotel And Leisure Club	DL5 6NL	2 courts	Poor	Poor quality courts with access for leisure club members only. One court is unusable	Protect, improve quality
Tennis	Rockcliffe Hall Hotel	DL2 2DU	1 tennis court	Standard to good	Tennis courts in grounds of hotel. Floodlit. Recent planning application approved to convert second tennis court into padel court (August 2025)	Protect.
Cricket	Rockcliffe Park	DL2 2DU	Grass cricket square (13 strips)	Good	High quality cricket ground accommodating large club. Heavy usage means overplay is evident and club require additional capacity. Club lack turf practice away from main square and revisions to existing changing accommodation are also required	Protect, maintenance of existing quality. Investment into training facilities (including NTP) and pavilion. Requirement for either extension of site or new capacity at second ground.
Football	Saint George Playing Field	DL2 1EE	1 adult 11v11	Poor	Poor quality single pitch site with no changing accommodation. Suffers from drainage issues. Spare capacity available at peak time.	Protect, seek to improve quality to increase capacity (through improved maintenance in the first instance). Ancillary facilities also required.
Football	Skerne Park Academy	DL1 5AJ	1 7v7	n/a	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use. Secure community use agreement.
Football	Skerne Park Community Centre	DL1 5AN	1 adult 11v11	Standard (low)	Spare capacity at peak time.	Protect, seek to improve quality (through improved maintenance in the first instance) to increased capacity
Tennis	South Park	DL1 5TG	2 courts (1 of which had equipment)	Standard to poor	Public facility. Free of charge but significant scope to increase use	Protect, improve quality as short term priority. Consider opportunities to integrate LTA booking systems / gate access. Improve marketing and promotion of courts

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
Bowls	South Park	DL1 5TG	1 bowling green	Standard	Green evidently well used and some reinstatement works are required. Strong membership numbers	Protect, invest in maintenance to improve quality
Football	South Park (Darlington)	DL1 5TB	1 5v5	Good	Site managed by DBC, offers scope for significantly more pitches than currently marked. No community use of pitch this season and consequently spare capacity is available	Protect, provide additional pitches on this site if demand is identified.
Football	Springfield	DL1 3DT	1 adult 11v11	Standard	Spare capacity to accommodate additional play outside of peak time. Used to capacity at peak time.	Protect, seek to improve quality (through improved maintenance in the first instance) to increase capacity. Ancillary facilities also required.
Tennis	St Aidans Academy	DL1 1LL	4 courts	Standard	No public access advertised to tennis courts, although lettings are available for other facilities. Standard quality overall	Protect for curricular use
Football	St Aidans Church Of England Academy	DL1 1LL	2 Youth 11v11, 1 9v9, 1 7v7, 1 5v5	Standard	Site capacity impacted by quality of playing fields, sunken drains causing particular issues. Youth 11v11, 9v9 and 7v7 have no remaining spare capacity at peak time.	Protect, improve pitch quality to increase capacity (through improved maintenance in the first instance, but additional sports turf agronomy assessment and subsequent works may be required to drains).
Football	St Georges Academy	DL2 1LD	1 Youth 11v11	n/a	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use. Secure community use agreement.
Football	Staindrop Road Playing Field	DL3 9DS	2 adult 11v11	Good	Pitches good quality but unused due to lack of available parking on site. Significant spare capacity therefore available	Protect. Retain quality and explore opportunities to provide parking so that usage can be reestablished

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
Tennis	Stanhope Park	DL3 7AU	2 courts (1 without equipment)	Poor	Public facility of limited quality. Free of charge but significant scope to increase use. Only one courts currently has equipment.	Protect, improve quality as short term priority. Consider opportunities to integrate LTA booking systems / gate access. Improve marketing and promotion of courts
Football	Teesside Airport Playing Fields	DL2 1NU	1 youth 11v11, 1 9v9, 1 7v7, 2 5v5	Poor	Lease for club now secured, but receives limited use during winter months due to quality. Spare capacity available (due to relocation of club during winter).	Protect, seek to address quality issues to enable increased usage and year round access (through improved maintenance in the first instance). Provide supporting ancillary facilities
Tennis	The Denes	DL3 9ND	3 courts (1 no equipment)	Poor	Public facility of limited quality. Free of charge but significant scope to increase use. One court not currently in use	Protect, improve quality as short term priority. Consider opportunities to integrate LTA booking systems / gate access. Improve marketing and promotion of courts
Football	Tommy Crooks Park	DL1 4NP	1 adult 11v11	Poor	Spare capacity to accommodate additional play, site of limited quality which impacts desirability	Protect, seek to improve quality to increase capacity (through improved maintenance in the first instance). Ancillary facilities also required.
Tennis	Wellfield Tennis Club	DL2 2LH	3 courts	Good	Recently renovated courts at tennis club. Primarily used by members although also available for pay and play. At capacity, lack of floodlighting limits potential	Protect, support club to provide floodlighting, and support club in finding access to covered courts. Maintain site quality
Football	West Park Academy	DL2 2GF	1 youth 11v11	Standard (low)	Basic school pitch available (on unsecured basis) for community use but not used. No available supporting ancillary facilities	Protect, explore opportunities for community use
Football	Whinfield Primary School	DL1 3HT	2 7v7	standard	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use
Bowls	Woodlands Bowls Club	DL3 9LN	6 bowling green		Privately run green. Green evidently well used and some	Protect, invest in maintenance to improve quality

Sport	Site Name	Postcode	Facilities Provided	Quality Rating	Summary Position	Key Actions / Recommendations
					reinstatement works are required. Strong membership numbers	
Football	Wyvern Academy	DL3 9SH	3 adult 11v11	Standard	Curricular use only	Protect for curricular use. Secure community use and address issues with car parking related to site. Seek to locate club at this site.
Rugby Union	Wyvern Academy	DL3 9SH	2 rugby union pitch	Standard	Rugby union pitch, no community use.	Protect for curricular use
Tennis	Wyvern Academy	DL3 9SH	3 courts	Standard	No public access to courts.	Protect for curricular use

Meeting Future Demand - Impact of New Development

- 3.29 The NPPF and Sport England guidance indicates that local authorities should develop and maintain a robust and up to date evidence base for sporting provision (this SFS and the accompanying monitoring process fulfils this requirement). This should be used to determine what sport and recreation provision is required and how this will be delivered.
- 3.30 Consideration is given both to current needs, but also to the future needs. This includes analysis of needs generated by potential participation growth and changes to the profile of the population, as well as by new development.
- 3.31 This SFS sets out the current and future needs and the provision that is required to meet these needs.
- 3.32 The assessment report demonstrated that the adopted and emerging Local Plans propose high levels of new development in Darlington, which will generate an increase in the local population and generate increased demand for sports facilities.
- 3.33 The Darlington Local Plan requires contributions towards green infrastructure as part of new development (policies ENV4, ENV5 and ENV9). The draft Darlington Local Plan Review 2025 – 2042 (currently undergoing consultation) proposes amendments to Policy ENV9, including clarification that contributions will be sought through the use and application of Sport England's Calculators.
- 3.34 This strategy promotes the use of these up to date tools, which provide a clear and transparent means of evaluating demand that arises from new development.
- 3.35 This section briefly summarises how the Playing Pitch Calculator (PPC) and Sports Facility Calculator (SFC) will be applied.

Application of Sport England Playing Pitch Calculator (PPC) and Sports Facility Calculator

- 3.36 The PPC estimates the additional demand for grass pitches and AGPs arising from specific or cumulative developments. It directly uses information from the SFC to provide an estimate of the demand that the additional population will produce. It considers;
- a) The likely number of people from the new population in each of the individual pitch sport age groups (Derived from the profile of the current population)
 - b) Using the number of teams identified in the SFS and the profile of the population (a), the likely number of teams that will be generated by the new development
- 3.37 Using the above information, the PPC then quantifies the number of Match Equivalent Sessions (MES) that will be generated in the peak period for each pitch type and converts that into a number of pitches that are required to sustain this demand. The costs associated with delivering that pitch provision are also given.

- 3.38 The Sports Facility Calculator (SFC) works on similar principles. It evaluates the additional demand that will be generated by a development for sports halls, swimming pools and indoor bowls in terms of visits per week. This is then converted into the quantity of facilities (measured in lanes / courts) to meet this demand.
- 3.39 For all facility types, the SFS is then used to determine whether the existing infrastructure is able to sustain the additional demand that will be generated, or whether improvements to the available capacity are required. If improvements are required, decisions are taken as to whether on site provision is justified, sustainable and necessary or if improvements to existing pitches / indoor facilities in the locality would better meet needs. The costs provided by the calculators help to identify the financial contribution that is required if facilities are to be provided off site, or if qualitative investment is required (instead of new provision).
- 3.40 This SFS has confirmed that the facility infrastructure in Darlington will require further investment if it is to continue to meet the needs of the population. With significant new housing developments proposed, it is essential that proposed policies requiring off contributions and / or on site new provision are implemented. In particular, this SFS notes that;
- Demand arising from new developments for football cannot be accommodated. There are already significant pressures on youth and 9v9 football pitches and this will grow as the population increases. The strategy recommends that a new multi pitch football hub is delivered to meet the needs of residents in new developments
 - New 3G AGPs are also required, both to meet existing needs but also to meet the increase in demand that will be generated as the population grows
 - The cricket infrastructure is at capacity and growth in demand cannot be accommodated. In addition to improvements at existing sites, the strategy recommends that new provision is considered as part of new developments
 - Growth in demand for rugby union cannot be met. There are already capacity pressures. Whilst additional capacity is therefore required for rugby union from new developments, it is most likely that this will be delivered through pitch improvements and 3G AGP (rather than on site provision)
 - The sand based AGP that is available is adequate to support current and projected demand for hockey, but investment will be required to maintain quality and ensure that future demand can be accommodated
 - Investment is required into the existing tennis and bowls infrastructure to ensure that sites remain sustainable and that future demand can be accommodated.
 - Opportunities for athletics to be integrated into new developments should be considered, and investment into the existing infrastructure to ensure that it remains functional will also be required.
 - The facility assessments provide an indication that the main swimming pools are already full and in need of investment to meet future needs. Growth will therefore impact on swimming needs both in terms of the existing supply, which will become busier.
 - New demand generated by residential development, can be met in the main by the existing Darlington supply of sports halls. However there will be increase in usage/throughput across the sports hall sites, which will have impacts, the capacity at sports halls will be more stretched. This will be further exacerbated if school sports hall access alters.

- There is general capacity to cope with growth in terms of sports halls but there will be impacts, particularly at Dolphin Centre, where there will be a need for on-going investment and modernisation. Increased pressure on the Dolphin centre, priority for investment.
 - Given its age the educational sports hall supply also needs to be invested in and protected for community use
 - Supply and demand for indoor facilities therefore clearly illustrates that there will be impacts of the projected growth that will require financial contributions. Investment should therefore be sought investment to improve the quality and capacity at the key swimming pool and sports hall sites in line with the application of Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator tool
 - Any new provision should clearly meet identified gaps, following consideration of supply and demand balance at the time
 - Contributions from developments should be sought in the main to maintain and enhance the existing swimming pool stock, in terms of upgrading and refurbishment. Contributions from developments should be sought in the main to maintain and enhance the sports hall stock, in terms of upgrading and refurbishment future sports hall investment should set out a need based on sports development and NGB requirements.
 - Any new sports hall provision should clearly meet identified gaps, following consideration of supply and demand balance at the time and should focus on smaller flexible spaces to deliver health and physical activity programmes in localities.
- 3.41 For some sports therefore, and in larger developments, on site provision may be required as part of new development. Alternatively, a standalone site funded through pooled contributions from new developments may be preferred. New provision is particularly necessary for 9v9 and youth 11v11 football and cricket. New facilities sports facilities should, where appropriate, include changing and ancillary provision and meet with National Governing Body (NGB) standards and, wherever possible, should be developed in conjunction with existing clubs.
- 3.42 The following general criteria should also be met;

- A high standard of design
 - Construction and maintenance appropriate to the standard of play
 - Adequate changing facilities that:
 - Are flexible, fit for a variety of purposes
 - Fully comply with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act
 - Provide for a number of different groups to use the facility at the same time, in safety and comfort, and
 - Meet current standards – Sport England and NGB guidelines.
 - Managed community access
 - Accessible by public transport and by car
 - Sufficient car parking
 - Size of pitches and run offs complies with NGB specification
 - Security of tenure (at least 23 years) if a club is to be based at the site.
- 3.43 All new and enhanced sports facilities must be designed in accordance with the relevant Sport England and (where applicable) National Governing Body (NGB) design guidance in order to ensure that the facilities are fit for purpose and of a suitable quality. Sport England's web site contains a range of current guidance documents which provide detailed specifications and information regarding the design of sporting and ancillary facilities. To ensure sustainability, new sites should include a minimum of two pitches. New single pitch sites for football are unlikely to be supported and new provision associated with any development of insufficient size to warrant more than one pitch should be located off site as part of a multi pitch development.
- 3.44 Where on site provision is not required, qualitative investment may be necessary in order to support the delivery of the SFS priorities and to ensure that capacity is adequate to meet future needs. The Local Plan requires consideration of requirements for all developments of 20 dwellings or more.
- 3.45 For illustrative purposes and to demonstrate the use of the SFC / PPS in a real life example, Tables 3.3 – 3.4 summarise the findings of the application of the PPC and SFC for two of the proposed housing developments that are of very different scale. We have provided some interpretation of the key findings to help guide decision making.
- 3.46 Moving forwards, the calculator should be used to determine the impact of each specific new development. Use of the PPC will be led by officers of Darlington Borough Council (with outputs of the calculator provided on request for developments) and a process for this will be developed as part of the implementation process for this strategy.

Table 3.3 – Impact of Skertingham Development

Skertingham (4500 dwellings) – 10350 people					
Sport	Demand Generated (Pitch / Facility Equivalent)	Capital Cost	Lifecycle cost (per annum)	Changing Rooms (Number)	Changing Rooms (Capital Cost)
Adult Football	1.87	£189,719	£37,375	3.75	£680,513
Youth Football	3.49	£291,750	£58,933	4.16	£754,331
Mini Soccer	4.14	109,335	£21,648	0	£0
Rugby Union	1.33	£204,472	£37,827	2.66	£481,969
Cricket	0.81	£257,658	£47,409	1.63	£295,234
Sand Based AGPs	0.06	£52,966	£1,377	0.12	£21,848
3G AGPS	0.5	£528,333	£18,011	1	£181,615
Outdoor Tennis	1.32	£113,099			
Sports Halls	0.63 halls (2.5 courts)	£1,653,666			
Swimming Pools	0.53 pools (2.11 lanes)	£2,127,790			
Indoor Bowls	0.03	£79,237			

3.47 At a high level, using the key findings of this SFS, alongside the data contained in Table 4,1 as a base, use of the PPC for the Skertingham development would suggest that;

- On site football provision should be considered – the demand generated for youth and 9v9 football in particular cannot be accommodated by the existing infrastructure, and the overall requirement would suggest that a hub site is required
- Demand almost equates to a full cricket pitch – given the identified need for additional capacity in the PPS and a potential additional ground, scope to deliver this should be considered
- Whilst there is also evidence that on site rugby provision is required, both existing rugby clubs have home grounds which require significant investment to improve capacity. It is likely that off site contributions would be of highest priority in this case
- The demand generated for hockey (sand based AGP is limited) – given that the SFS identifies that there is capacity to meet both current and future demand, but a requirement for qualitative investment, off site contributions should be prioritised
- There is a need for additional 3G pitches, the overall demand generated is not sufficient to require on site provision, but off site contributions will be needed
- Demand for outdoor tennis is over 1 court. At the current time, improvements to existing infrastructure would better serve residents of any new development than investment into new facilities
- Whilst there are enough facilities within the existing indoor facility infrastructure, residents will impact on the demand and usage, making facilities busier. Contributions towards existing facilities will therefore be required

Table 3.4 – Impact of Hall Farm

Hall Farm (400 dwellings) – 920 people					
Sport	Demand Generated (Pitch Equivalent)	Capital Cost	Lifecycle cost	Changing Rooms (Number)	Changing Rooms (Capital Cost)
Adult Football	0.17	£16,864	£3,322	0.33	£60,490
Youth Football	0.31	£35,934	£5,239	0.37	£67,063
Mini Soccer	0.37	£9,717	£1,924	0	£0
Rugby Union	0.12	£18,176	£3,363	0.24	£42,844
Cricket	0.07	£22,903	£4,214	0.14	£26,243
Sand Based AGPs	0.01	£4,708	£122	0.01	£1,942
3G AGPS	0.04	£46,960	£1,601	0.09	£16,142

Outdoor Tennis	0.12	£11,831			
Sports Halls	0.06 halls (0.22 courts)	£146,993			
Swimming Pools	0.05 pools (0.19 lanes)	£189,137			
Indoor Bowls	0.02 rinks	£7,043			

3.48 Table 3.4 evidences that the demand generated by Hall Farm will be much lower, and is not high enough to warrant a requirement for on site provision. That said, there are capacity issues with all sports and consequently, the demand generated cannot be accommodated without investment. Off site contributions will therefore be required.

3.49 The above calculation provide examples of how the SFS should be used to evaluate the impact of new developments and whether the demand that is generated can be met.

	Recommendation	Key Actions
Planning 1	Ensure that planning policy requires contributions towards playing field provision and outdoor sports facilities from new development	• Incorporate policy into Local Plan Review to clarify requirement for developer contributions relating to sport and recreation
Planning 2	Build on the existing processes used to determine S106 contributions to incorporate the use of the PPC and SFC. This will ensure that contributions can be collected in a transparent manner. Contributions should be directed to meet the needs and shortfalls identified in this SFS. The requirements of the Local Football Facilities Plan (LFFP) should also be considered as further grant funding can be leveraged.	• Meet to understand calculator and opportunities available • Review and tailor existing approach including agreement of process to feed back to developers • Integrate approach within policy • Ensure consistent application of priorities of this SFS.

3.50 The next section sets out how the strategy will be monitored and implemented.

4.0 Implementation, Monitoring and Review

Introduction

- 4.1 Section 3 set out the strategic framework for sports facilities across Darlington and outlined the sports specific recommendations that will be delivered over the next five years. It set out how the recommendations will be achieved, by when and by whom.
- 4.2 This section summarises how the strategy will be implemented and sets out the proposed approach to monitoring and review.

Implementation

- 4.3 Given the potential level of funding required, investment will only be achieved through a combination of opportunities and funding sources.
- 4.4 The sport specific action plan demonstrates how success will require work across multiple agencies, and it is intended that this strategy will build on the successful partnerships that have been forged across the delivery of previous versions of the Darlington SFS.
- 4.5 Not all actions will be the responsibility of Darlington Borough Council – instead the Council will promote a multi-agency approach to address the facility requirements in this SFS. Delivery will include Schools and Clubs as well as National Governing Bodies of Sport.
- 4.6 Local authority finances remain under pressure and previous major national funding programmes are no longer available. Some funding opportunities, however, still remain and it is essential that these are capitalised upon in order to maximise the opportunities to protect and improve pitch provision.
- 4.7 The main funding delivery mechanisms for the Council and others in delivering the strategy are;
- Planning obligations– new development and population growth will generate additional demand for additional indoor and outdoor sports facilities. Section 3 confirmed that all new developments should contribute towards the provision of outdoor and indoor sports facilities, whether through the provision of new facilities or the improvement of existing
 - National Governing Body (NGB) support and Funding
 - Capital Grant funding: From schools and national agencies such as Sport England
 - Council funding: capital funding allocated to deliver facilities within the Council's ownership
 - Education and Further Education sector: while the previous sources of funding have changed and the scale of the education capital programmes have been reduced, the education sector is still likely to be a key funding stream.
- 4.8 There are currently many funding streams which are accessible to clubs and some providers. To support the delivery of this strategy therefore, clubs will be encouraged to work alongside the respective sports bodies to apply for funding.

Monitoring and Review

- 4.9 The evolving context of participation in sport means that monitoring and review of the strategy is as important as the initial preparation of the assessment.
- 4.10 Reflecting the importance of this phase of work, monitoring of the strategy represents Step 10 of the approach to the production of a PPS in the guidance for the delivery of a playing pitch Strategy (Sport England 2013), and is also the final stage of the new emerging guidance (Step 5).
- 4.11 The 2015 and 2021 strategies were both successfully monitored by Darlington Borough Council and it is therefore intended that this next strategy will be monitored using the same approach. The steering group are therefore committed to keeping the strategy alive through;
- Monitoring the delivery of the recommendations and actions and identifying any changes that are required to the priority afforded to each action;
 - Recording changes to the facility stock and evaluating the impact of this on the supply and demand information;
 - Assessing the impact of changes to participation and changing trends on the amount and type of facilities required;
 - Assessing the impact of demographic changes and any changes to forecasted plans for housing growth;
 - Ongoing consultation to understand the evolving needs of clubs and governing bodies, and any requirements for new or improved facilities in the area;
 - Analysis of funding sources and new funding opportunities for the provision/improvement of sports facilities;
 - Reviewing growth of emerging sports, their participation rates, facilities available for them and likely facilities necessary for their support and development; and
 - Ensuring that the strategy continues to provide an up to date and robust evidence base to underpin CIL / S106 obligations.
- 4.12 The working group will continue to meet to review progress by all key partners on the strategy delivery and to discuss any issues arising.
- 4.13 The working group will also determine, through the monitoring process, when the next refresh of this strategy document is required.