

Appendix A – Pitch and Recreational Spaces Strategy Development Brief

Mid Ulster District Council approved its Sports Facility Strategy in May 2018 which provided a framework for the future prioritisation, development and provision of sports facilities at a local level in order to meet identified community need, helping to increase participation, addressing health inequalities, and other local specific factors. With reference to grass pitches, it was recognized that the limitations to the strategic planning work undertaken included the fact that every natural grass pitch could not be visited and for this reason, the Strategy focused only on headline issues, with the realisation that natural grass pitches needed to be examined through a more detailed piece of research.

An action arising from the Sports Facility Strategy 2018 was that Council seek to develop a pitch strategy.

Presently, Council do not have a framework for the consideration of specific developmental and/or leasing requests by clubs or groups within leisure or a capital investment programme for pitches (outside of “normal” routine maintenance).

Mid Ulster District Council issued a quotation specification during March 2021 for a competent specialist organisation/individual to undertake a condition survey of all Council pitches / recreational spaces and to make recommendations for a Council pitches / spaces strategy.

The scope of work and service required is for a two part study to be carried out into the current Mid Ulster District Council ‘pitch’ (and associated changing) provision and to create a strategy that could be used to further develop the pitch infrastructure in the District in a way that is affordable, sustainably, inclusive, high quality and consistent with current best practice in public pitch provision.

It is recognised that a shared, strategic approach to open space maximises its potential to contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable future.

The development of a strategy allows for a cross Council approach to use of leisure pitches and recreational space with Leisure Services, Health and Wellbeing, Community and Good Relations to ensure they are shared and maximised community assets.

Strategy, Policies and Plans

The focus of this strategy is about developing people by encouraging active lifestyles through the provision of facilities. The Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 audit evidences the Council’s role in the provision of sports pitches and therefore in the development of opportunities for active and healthier lifestyles. This proposed strategy development comes at a time when an active lifestyle is recognised as vitally important in helping to reduce the incidence of a range of life-limiting diseases. It also makes significant contributions to at least two of the five Council strategic themes in its Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024:

- Theme 2: Service Delivery
- Theme 5: Communities

This strategy development should take cognizance of current Strategic plans:

- Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024
- Community Plan for Mid Ulster District Council 2017 “Our Community Plan, 10 year plan for Mid Ulster” – promoting healthy and active lifestyles, helping address mental health, health inequalities and greater community development engagement.

- Mid Ulster District Council Local Development Plan 2030
- Mid Ulster District Council Village Plans
- Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018
- Mid Ulster District Council Open Space, Recreation and Leisure 2015
- Mid Ulster District Council Public Parks and Play Five Year Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025
- Mid Ulster District Council Sports Club Survey 2019
- The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport & Physical Recreation 2009-2019 ‘Sport Matters’
- Sport Northern Ireland Corporate Plan 2015-2020
- Northern Ireland Executive: Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2021
- Active Living: No Limits 2016-2021
- Sport NI Wellbeing in Sport Action Plan 2019-2025
- Active Places Research Report (Bridging the Gap) 2009
- Active Places Research Report 2014 Update, Bridging the Gap

In addition, linked to Mid Ulster District Council’s Corporate Plan 2020 – 2025, while each of the strategic themes has a clear focus and purpose, there are also a number of corporate commitments which are not tethered to one area of work, but are common to all and should be realised via this project and strategy development:

- Addressing rurality
 - *“Close to 70% of Mid Ulster’s population live in a rural setting, a fact which has strongly influenced the Council’s approach to service delivery, investment and long-term planning. The importance of addressing the needs of a rural region, whether socially or economically, is undiminished and remains one of the Council’s corporate commitments.”*
- Promoting Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations
 - *“Beyond a duty of compliance with our equality scheme, we aim to mainstream the promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations throughout the organisation, actively seeking out ways in which to enhance those opportunities and to build positive relations between and among the diverse communities across Mid Ulster.”*
- Working in partnership our Good Relations and Community Development Teams to further promote shared spaces across Mid Ulster in all our towns and villages to seek to bring people together and maximise resources.

- Continuously improving our services
 - *“Whether through our formal Corporate Improvement Objectives and service-specific Performance Improvement Plans or the small, regular, routine changes which we make to services through feedback, we are committed to continuously improving what we do and how we do it.”*
 - *Working in partnership with our outreach sports and leisure teams, Health and Wellbeing teams to promote active and health lifestyles for all.*

- Designing and delivering our services sustainably
 - *“From large-scale investment projects to new or changing service models, we place a value on ensuring that what we do not only meets current needs, but is designed and delivered to be sustainable in the longer-term, ensuring the needs of future generations are uncompromised.”*

- Working collaboratively across the public, private, community and voluntary sector to achieve shared objectives
 - *“Collaborative working is key to delivering successful outcomes for local people. The Council is committed to embracing the opportunities to work with a range of other organisations on issues, projects and plans as they relate to every theme, priority and aspect of our work.”*

Aims and Objectives of the Strategy Development

- (1) it is estimated that it should take 6-8 months to complete this initial work with an anticipated presentation of initial recommendations for Members consideration by October/November 2021.

- (2) An equality screening and rural needs impact assessment should be completed at the outset of each part and then be included for the final report and Strategy recommendations in order to identify any potential differential impacts and possible mitigating actions.

- (3) Through local consultations with various stakeholders, the strategy should seek to understand in detail the current Council owned pitch assets, their accompanying infrastructure (including changing provision) and their condition.

- (4) The Pitches (and associated changing provision) Strategy should set out a 5 year plan (with outline recommendations to 10 years) with an indicative budget and make area specific recommendations and provide cost estimates in relation to a range of options

Requirement Details (Part 1):

Audit the design, distribution, demand/supply information and condition of each Mid Ulster District Council site that hosts Council owned and leased outdoor 'pitches' and associated changing facilities in the District. This audit is to include all natural turf, synthetic 'pitches' (ATP) and multi-use games areas/small sided games/kick about areas for:

- Association football
- Gaelic games
- Hockey
- Rugby

Make recommendations and provide indicative capital and ongoing annual revenue cost estimates to any identified remedial/improvement works or further technical investigations necessary on the Council owned and leased pitches, multi-use games areas, small sided games/kick about areas and associated changing facilities.

Requirement Details (Part 2):

Review and provide an update report on the current provision data and previous strategy work available (Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018) and evaluate against:

- Current best practice guidance on the scale and distribution of pitch provision from Fields in Trust, Edinburgh University, and elsewhere (as appropriate),
- Condition assessments (from Part 1) based on visual inspections and/or maintenance records/observations
- The changing needs/expectations of many outdoor sports
- Demand/supply/poor condition closure information,
- Existing information for relevant non-Council facilities,
- An assessment of current changing provision at each venue; and
- Local consultation responses

To make recommendations for a prioritised 'pitch' (and associated changing provision) investment strategy for the District and provide indicative capital and ongoing annual revenue cost estimates. Research should also be carried out on potential current and future known funding bids/mechanisms that may be available to support the investment strategy.

The Pitches / recreational space (and associated changing provision) Strategy should set out a 5 year plan on a priority basis (with outline recommendations to 10 years) and make area specific recommendations and provide indicative capital and ongoing annual revenue cost estimates in relation to a range of options including:

- Refurbishments to assets
- New provision based on need
- Obsolete pitch provision and new identified shared space community need
- Extensions to facilities
- Rationalisation into outdoor sports hubs
- Partnership provision/shared
- Opportunities for long term leases
- Facility types, sporting codes, scale and playing surface
- High level specifications to accommodate the likely use pattern, sporting code and standard of competition
- Opportunities for multi-use of facilities including formalised sports and informal recreational use to support community engagement and health and wellbeing

The strategy should consider the best mix and distribution of natural turf, synthetic 'pitches' (ATP) and multi-use games areas/small sided games/kick about areas on current and future need (including unmet need) and provide analysis on the projected demand pattern, participation levels, data on current booking levels and the distribution and scale of sports clubs and sporting codes in the area.

Consideration should be given to how effective partnerships with the private, education, public or third sector organisations could bring benefits to the pitch provision in the District in a way that is open and accessible while at the same time maximises sustainability, efficiency and community benefit. This may include developing it further as a pitch or it becoming open informal play space for general use.

The strategy should give consideration to areas where there is under supply of pitches, taking account of Council and community provision and make recommendations of how to provide for demand.

The strategy should give consideration to areas where there is oversupply of pitches and how these could be developed as usable assets for the wider benefit of the community as shared space provision.

The Strategy recommendations should take account of levels of deprivation and barriers to access such as disability or rurality, shared space in our towns and villages etc. This should include some areas of recommendation with regard to levels of pitch provision usage across the District and then more localised usage; and flexible models to accommodate more formalised sport and more targeting of groups that are not in sports including young people not playing recognised sports and older people engagement

Extensive consultation will be an essential element of the successful completion of the contract. The successful provider will be required to consult with:

- local communities,
- sports groups/clubs,
- maintenance staff
- bookings staff
- schools/colleges
- local leagues; and
- governing bodies of sport / Regional development bodies / Development officers,
- Council officers
- Any others that are deemed necessary and relevant to this project

Requirement Details (General for both Part 1 & 2):

The successful contractor will be expected to provide an evidence base for their audit findings and Strategy recommendations through reference to identified key national and local strategies, policies and practices.

The review findings conclusions and recommendations for Part 1 and Part 2 must be collated into separate final reports. It is envisaged that the final reports, when combined with a Pitch Implementation Plan, will provide a practical working tool to which Council and its officers can refer to whenever decisions relating to pitch provision are made in the future and this should reference indicative capital and ongoing annual revenue cost estimates.