

Report on	Audit of Natural Grass Playing Pitches in Mid Ulster
Date of Meeting	13 th September
Reporting Officer	Oliver McShane
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Is this report restricted for confidential business? If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	
	No	x

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To update members on an audit of existing natural grass pitches across Mid Ulster with an assessment of usage based on the number of teams currently using these facilities.
2.0	Background
2.1	The Mid Ulster (MUDC) Sports Facility Strategy previously presented to Council 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.
2.2	The focus of the Strategy however was on the following facilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sports halls of 4 courts or above (except those on education sites) • pools of 20m and above, • health and fitness suites of 20 stations and above • full size AGPs (Artificial Grass Pitches)
2.3	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.
2.4	In order to commence this research development committee requested that MUDC Officers carry out an audit of natural grass pitches and at the same time try to quantify the usage levels of the identified pitches.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	It is widely recognised that natural grass pitches can only accommodate a restricted amount of use whilst still maintaining adequate playing quality. Grassroots pitches which are well constructed, drained and maintained should be able to accommodate approximately seven hours per week of the varied type of use expected, according to the Sports and Play Construction Association (SAPCA).

3.2	<p>It should be noted that this is very much dependant on the pitch being of the requisite quality and receiving an appropriate level of routine maintenance. Pitches which do not meet such a standard cannot be expected to accommodate such high levels of use. The amount of use the pitch will be able to withstand relates to a number of variables. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weather conditions before and during use - Turf density and rooting depth - Grass species and varieties - If weather time dependant play is required i.e. whether it is possible to restrict pitch during poor weather conditions - Pitch usage pattern - Pitch maintenance, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Aeration programmes o Fertiliser regimes o Mowing frequency o Topdressing practices o Scarification and thatch control o Decompaction treatments
3.3	<p>Phase 1 of the audit process was to collect the relevant information from both the sport Governing bodies and local contacts. This is presented in the Appendix 1 along with Phase 2 of the exercise which was a desk top assessment of pitch usage. For information we have also included MUDC facilities which in the main are in good condition with usage levels managed and annual maintenance programmes in place.</p>
3.4	<p>A number of assumptions have been made during this process to allow for comparison with SAPCA guidance of 7 hours use per week (Sport England recommendation varies between 2hrs and 6hrs per week depending on drainage).</p>
3.5	<p>We have assumed each team trains for 1 hour per night and 2 nights per week as well as playing matches home and away. This gives a 2.5 factor of use per week. This is divided by the number of pitches even though some cannot be used for matches. It does not account for use of Club based 3g or that clubs do use other facilities ie schools or MUDC facilities depending on their location. In addition these usage figures do not include all the other groups who use the pitches eg summer camps, blitzs etc. and does not account for the pitch having floodlights. Mini rugby is recorded as 1 hr use per week.</p>
3.6	<p>This information is provided only for guidance, clubs can use this formula to obtain a more accurate figure per week based on actual usage. However it is evident from the data that almost all natural grass pitches in the area are over used, and whilst additional usage can in some cases be accommodated on 3G pitches, MUDC facilities or on Education Authority sites where permitted, the high levels of over use need further examination.</p>
3.7	<p>This audit does not make any comment on the quality of the identified pitches however anecdotal evidence would suggest that they vary in performance standards with some exceptionally well maintained and others to a lesser standard.</p>
3.8	<p>It is possible to commission an additional piece of work to project the need and supply of Artificial and Natural turf pitches in the future using Sport Englands Playing Pitch Methodology however the extremely high levels of over use demonstrated in this report will be key a contributing factor.</p>

3.9	It should be noted that in order for natural grass pitches to perform to their best a regular maintenance programme should be implemented. It is estimated by Sport England this can cost in excess of £5,000 per year. The works required include mowing, verti-draining, top dressing and re seeding (for high wear areas re-turfing may be required) and spraying for weeds. Specialist maintenance programmes are widely available from sports Governing Bodies, Sport England etc.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: N/A
	Human: N/A
	Risk Management: N/A
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To consider the results of this audit of natural grass pitches, and to allow MUDC Officers to engage with relevant sporting clubs to further develop a policy regarding the future demand, need and maintenance of natural grass playing pitches.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix 1 – Natural Grass Pitch Use