

BSF Waves 7 and Beyond

The Readiness to Deliver Requirement for a Playing Fields Strategy

Partnerships for Schools 'Readiness to Deliver Guidance for Local Authorities in Waves 7 and beyond' (February 2009) includes a requirement for the completion of an up to date Playing Fields Strategy prior to the remit meeting.

This note provides answers to key questions regarding the requirement and sets out Sport England's expectations of what is meant by 'an up to date Playing Fields Strategy'.

What is meant by a Playing Fields Strategy?

A Playing Fields Strategy will comprise a carefully quantified and documented assessment of the current and future needs for playing field land within an agreed geographical area.

The assessment should cover the quantity, quality, capacity and accessibility of all relevant playing pitch and non playing pitch provision. The strategy will then use the information gained from the assessment to develop recommendations and an action plan which seeks to address any identified deficiencies.

For playing pitches (grass and synthetic turf) the strategy should follow Sport England's adopted methodology '*Towards a Level Playing Field: A Guide to the Production of Playing Pitch Strategies*' (2003)¹ which includes the application of the eight step Playing Pitch Model.

Through the application of its Facilities Planning Model Sport England has recently undertaken an assessment of the supply and demand of Synthetic Turf Pitches across the country. This information should be used to supplement the '*Towards a Level Playing Field*' methodology and is available on request through Sport England's local offices.

As far as they are relevant the principles of the '*Towards a Level Playing Field*' methodology should also be followed for non playing pitch provision (e.g. Multi-Use Games Areas including tennis and netball courts). This should include an assessment of supply and demand within appropriate catchments along with consultation with all relevant users, sports clubs and the National Governing Bodies of Sport.

What is meant by 'up to date'?

For a strategy to be deemed 'up to date' it will have been completed or adequately reviewed within the last three years. The extent of any review will be dependant on the nature of any changes in the supply and demand of playing field land since the development of the strategy or previous review. If a review of an existing strategy is planned for outside of this three year period it should be demonstrated that the review timetable is appropriate.

Who is responsible for developing a Playing Fields Strategy?

It is the responsibility of the local authority leading the BSF bid to ensure that this requirement is complied with. However, there may be appropriate work already completed or underway within the relevant geographical area that may assist in meeting the requirement. For example, the planning departments within borough, district and unitary council's may already have produced an open space, sport and recreation assessment and strategy to support their Local Development Framework. In addition, the relevant leisure departments may have already carried out the playing pitch element of the strategy to support investment decisions, sports development programmes and funding applications.

¹. Web Link: www.sportengland.org > Facilities and Planning > Planning Tools and Guidance

The first task in developing a Playing Fields Strategy should therefore be to establish what work is already in place within the area of the BSF bid. This should be done by contacting the relevant officers, i.e. Head of Planning and Head of Leisure, at the relevant district, borough or unitary authority. Sport England may also be able to assist in passing on knowledge of any existing strategies or work currently underway in the specific area.

Where a strategy does not exist or an update is required the authority leading the BSF bid should seek to ensure that all parties (i.e. county and district/borough councils) pool their resources to develop a new, or update an existing, strategy. The above partnership approach should also be taken between education, planning and leisure departments within unitary authorities. The work should also ensure the close involvement of the BSF PE and Sport Stakeholder Group.

How will a Playing Fields Strategy benefit the BSF programme?

The benefits for local authorities of having an up to date Playing Fields Strategy in place are considerable and include:

- Ensuring a strategic approach to playing field provision to assist the work of a number of departments including planning, leisure and education;
- Providing a robust and demand led evidence base to inform investment, planning, sports development, programming, management and maintenance decisions;
- Highlighting deficiencies in the quantity, quality and/or accessibility of playing field land.
- Prioritising actions to address deficiencies and ensure a strategic and authority wide approach to improving the provision of playing field land;

In addition to the above points, an up to date Playing Fields Strategy will aid the delivery of the BSF transformation agenda for PE and sport by informing key decisions relating to:

- The strategic planning and design of the estate;
- The nature and extent of community use;
- The management and maintenance of playing field land.

This information will be key to both the PE and sport stakeholder group and wider BSF project team in addressing curriculum, extra curriculum and community needs for playing field land.

The existence of an up to date strategy, to which the development of the BSF programme and estate adheres to, will provide significant assistance when engaging with the planning system. The strategy will provide the necessary information to allow both the local planning authority and Sport England as a statutory consultee² to adequately assess any BSF proposals affecting playing field land, thereby reducing potential delays in the planning process.

What geographical study area should be used?

As a minimum the study area should equate with the relevant district, borough or unitary council administrative area which is affected by BSF whilst taking into account cross boundary issues (e.g. demand from sports clubs).

However, the study area should reflect the likely geographical nature of the supply and demand for playing field land which is likely to cross local authority boundaries. This point will be particularly critical for agreeing the study area within a large local authority where a strategy for the entire administrative area may not be appropriate e.g. the new unitary councils of Cornwall and Wiltshire. Appropriate sub areas should also be established which reflect the nature of, and the catchments within, the agreed study area.

How long does the development of a strategy take?

The actual timescale to undertake a strategy will be heavily dependant on the size of the authority, the nature of any information that already exists, the level of resource allocated to the

². Web Link: www.sportengland.org > Facilities and Planning > Handy Links 'Our Policy on Playing Fields'

work, whether the work will be undertaken in house or by external consultants and the level of commitment by all parties. Undertaking the playing pitch element of the strategy for a single district can take up to, and in some circumstances, exceed six months. Even if basic information on pitch supply is available the research into demand is likely to take around 8 to 10 weeks. Appropriate lead in times in relation to the BSF process should therefore be established which also take into account what time of year the assessment side of the strategy should be carried out (see below).

How should the development of a strategy be managed?

The development of the strategy should be overseen by a steering group with a composition reflecting the scope of the study, the catchment area involved, the internal structure of the commissioning body (i.e. local authority leisure, sports development, parks and maintenance, planning and education departments) and other relevant external bodies.

The steering group should ensure close liaison with the BSF PE and Sport Stakeholder Group along with key parties involved in the provision and use of playing field land in the area, including key providers and sports governing bodies.

Which sports should be included?

The strategy should include all playing pitch and non playing pitch sports relevant to the local area. The nature and extent of the provision included should be decided following consultation with the PE and Sport Stakeholder Group. Where appropriate the strategy should take into account both competition and training requirements for male and female participants along with appropriate age groups e.g. adult and junior. For some sports the number of facilities (e.g. pitches or courts) required may be so small that an assessment should be undertaken on a club-specific basis.

Appropriate non playing pitch sports could include netball, tennis and basketball which would require an assessment of the court provision for each sport and of Multi-Use Games Areas.

What time of year should the assessment side of the strategy be carried out?

For playing pitch provision the most suitable time to carry out the assessment work is the beginning of the winter season (i.e. September to December/early January) when winter pitches are marked out and pitch quality can be adequately assessed. This timing will also allow for data and views to be collated from both the last full winter season and the recently ended summer season.

What level of support is on offer from Sport England?

Sport England is able to offer the following support to authorities looking to develop or update a Playing Fields Strategy:

- Understanding and applying the 'Towards a Level Playing Field' methodology;
- Reviewing and providing comment on draft briefs for undertaking such work, existing strategies to help determine the extent of any update required and draft strategies to ensure they adhere to the '*Towards a Level Playing Field*' methodology;
- Providing information as required to steering group meetings, and
- Providing a template brief for a strategy along with a list of consultants known to undertake such work.

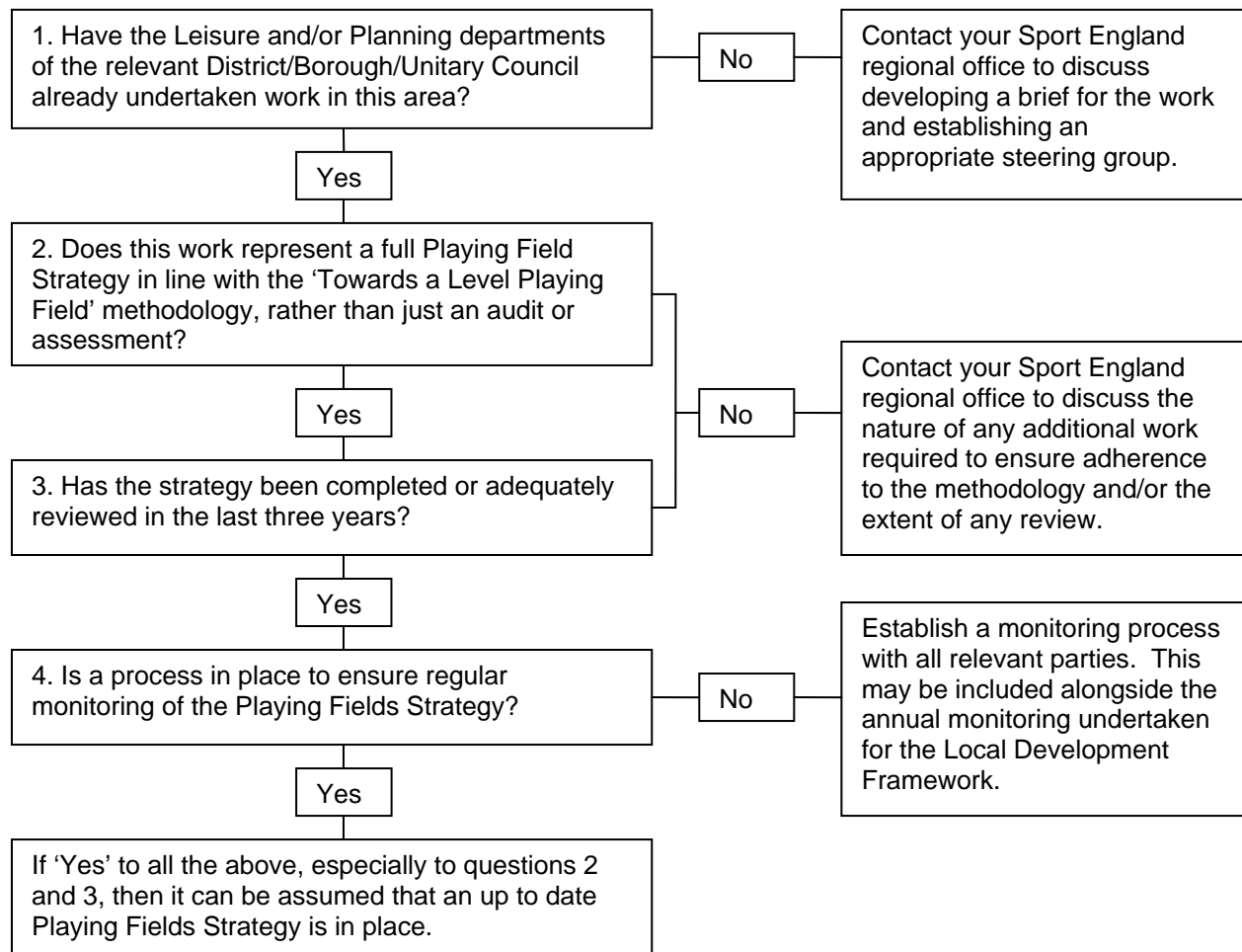
Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Assessment Framework will also provide a very useful checklist regarding the development of any Playing Field Strategy. The framework, which is available on request from Sport England's local offices, follows the '*Towards a Level Playing Field*' methodology for playing pitch provision but is also relevant to the assessment of non-pitch provision.

Sport England does not currently have any funding available to support the production of Playing Field Strategies.

What are the first steps that should be taken to progress this area of work?

Figure 1 below sets out the initial questions that require answering to progress the work and the actions that should be taken.

Figure 1: The Initial steps to developing a Playing Fields Strategy.



Contact details for your Sport England local office are available at:

www.sportengland.org/about_us/how_we_are_structured/our_local_offices.aspx