

Developing a Sports Facilities Strategy for Northumberland



A Report from pmpgenesis



Executive Summary

Preamble

This summary document sets out an approach taken by Northumberland Sport to establish a long term plan for sports facilities. The consultants commissioned to undertake the study were asked to utilise the nationally recognised Facilities Planning Model (FPM) in analysing different types of facilities. This included sports halls and swimming pools. It should be noted that the FPM model is theoretical, and relies on demographic data, assumptions about customer travel times and behaviours, the age of facilities and history of investment in them.

The findings which identify for example unmet demand or satisfied demand should therefore be used only as a guide. Local intelligence and data together with additional information such as customer satisfaction surveys are all suggested to be considered along side the FPM model.

The more detailed consultants report is of significant size and can be made available on request. However, for the purposes of offering meaningful consultation and a user friendly document this summary explains the main findings and recommendations of the study.

Introduction

- i) The vision for Northumberland Sport is ***to develop and increase participation in sport, building healthy and successful communities***. In order to fulfil this vision, it is important that communities have access to a range of sports and physical activities through sufficient levels of quality facilities.
- ii) This report is intended to provide answers to the following key questions:
 - what does the **facility infrastructure** for sport currently look like in Northumberland?
 - what and where are the **gaps in provision**?
 - what are the issues in terms of **quality and accessibility**?
 - what should the County's **future sporting facility landscape** look like?
 - where do **opportunities** exist to improve the sporting landscape and where is **future investment** required?
- iii) The creation of a new single unitary authority in Northumberland provides the opportunity to take a fresh look at facilities planning and development, including the need for specialist facilities and performance venues. It is intended that a new strategy will help the Council to gain a clearer contextual view of sports facility provision and inform the authority as to what sports provision is required in the future. Importantly where investment will have optimum impact and what facilities could be considered within the education sector.
- iv) It should be noted that the majority of the data/research that informs this report is collated in relation to the six former local authorities (ie Alnwick, Berwick, Blyth Valley, Castle Morpeth, Tynedale and Wansbeck). Northumberland County Council has since established three new sub areas (North, West and South East) that will be key to community engagement and service planning in the future.
- v) Northumberland is expected to join Building Schools for the Future (BSF) in around 2013/14 and this report will provide data to assist the authority in determining what sports provision could be considered as part of the programme.

- vi) This report has been developed in two phases:
- **phase one** involved the production of a summary paper which extracted the detail from within the Regional Facilities Strategy, produced by Sport England, that relates specifically Northumberland
 - **phase two** built upon this work by providing more detailed information with regard to the existing sports facility infrastructure, highlighting key issues, gaps in provision and future development opportunities.
- vii) As part of the second phase of work, consultation was undertaken with each of the former local authorities and leisure service providers to gain an understanding of issues and opportunities specific to each of the geographical areas.
- viii) This is in addition to consultation with National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), which set out to understand the needs and requirements for the sub-region for their specific sport.

Sub-regional profile

- ix) Northumberland is a large geographic area with significant variations across the County in terms of demographic make up, physical activity levels, educational attainment, facility accreditation and has no venues of regional significance within its sports facility infrastructure.
- x) There is a clear distinction between the **rural North and West** of the county (sparsely populated, relatively affluent, ageing population) and the more **urban South East** (densely populated, high levels of deprivation, a younger population), in particular the former local authority areas of Blyth Valley and Wansbeck.

Facility analysis

- xi) The tables which follow provide a summary of the key issues and potential solutions identified across Northumberland with regard to each type of facility and **Appendix 1** provides a guide to the estimated costs of various facility types.

Table 1 – Summary of swimming pool provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>24 facilities identified by Active Places in Northumberland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 local authority • 5 school sites • 10 commercial. <p>The following pools were also identified via consultation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Granary Swimming Pool • Haltwhistle Swimming & Leisure Centre • Leaplish Waterside Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmet demand spread across the County, with particular issues in West Northumberland (suggesting accessibility issues).Note: Haltwhistle and Leaplish pools excluded from the model. • Possible underutilisation of existing facilities in some areas, possibly linked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessibility (travel distance) North & West - some poor quality facilities (South East). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve community transport to local authority swimming pool facilities in rural areas. • Address accessibility issues through improved links with private providers (eg holiday parks/hotels). For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seafield / Amble Caravan Park - Haggerston / Berwick Holiday Park • Explore transport/access at Council owned facilities to address unmet demand and accessibility issues in North and West Northumberland. • Address quality issues through a structured upgrade/refurbishment programme. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - upgrade or replace Ashington Leisure Centre. Consider future investment at Concordia Leisure Centre (SE) - Upgrade or replace Astley High School Pool - Maintain high standards through investment in maintenance and refurbishment • Develop a facility replacement plan for the next 25 years • Explore the opportunity to utilise the pool at Collingwood School for increased community/club use to meet some of the unmet demand in the South East • Develop a standardised Community Use Agreement that can be tailored to local circumstances • Implement improved marketing and promotion activities to attract and retain hard to reach groups in more deprived areas.

Table 2 – Summary of sports hall provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>52 sites identified by Active Places in Northumberland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 education • 10 local authority • 2 private. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmet demand identified equivalent to 11 badminton courts across the County • Unmet demand is spread across the county, with particular issues in the North and West (suggesting accessibility issues) Note: Rede, Tynedale and Coquet Centre at Otterburn and other smaller facilities excluded from model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve community transport to local authority sports hall facilities in rural areas.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible underutilisation of existing facilities in rural areas (North and West) • Likely to be linked to accessibility issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address accessibility issues in rural areas through improved access to smaller facilities (eg village/church halls, school sites) • Develop a standardised Community Use Agreement (CUA) that can be tailored to local circumstances. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the rural North and West would require an emphasis on 'multi-use' facilities due to the sparse population with limited access to facilities - the urban South East could explore the provision of 'sport specific' facilities due to a higher number of facilities that are more easily accessible by the more concentrated population. • Adopt a two phase approach to the implementation of effective CUAs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - take a county wide, strategic approach to the identification of priority sports and engagement with schools, private providers, community use spaces etc - implement a more localised strategy that addresses the unique issues that exist within rural and urban communities.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sport specific facilities (eg basketball, badminton, gymnastics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore options with National Governing Bodies to locate specialist facilities in areas where they can serve the maximum possible population and where appropriate long term management arrangements are in place.

Table 3 – Summary of athletics track provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>Five outdoor athletics tracks in Northumberland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coquet High School, Alwick (cinder) • Eleventh Avenue Track, Blyth Valley (cinder) • Craik Park, Castle Morpeth (cinder) • Wentworth Leisure Centre, Tynedale (synthetic) • Bedlingtonshire Community School, Wansbeck (cinder) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no athletics facilities in the former authority of Berwick • Eleventh Avenue Track, Blyth, no longer of an appropriate standard for use. • Craik Park, Castle Morpeth, inadequate changing facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • England Athletics has identified a need for an outdoor training facility in north Northumberland • Opportunity to provide an outdoor training facility on a school site via the impending Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • England Athletics recommends a standard of one outdoor synthetic track per 250,000 people • There is currently only one synthetic track in the county, which has a population of c300,000. However, a large proportion of this population fall outside of the recommended 45 minute drivetime catchment • Northumberland’s one synthetic track therefore falls well below this standard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • England Athletics has identified a need for an outdoor 6/8 lane synthetic track in Morpeth • Opportunity to provide an outdoor 6/8 lane synthetic track on a school site via BSF.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cinder tracks do not meet England Athletics standards for training or competition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore opportunities to upgrade existing facilities to bring them in line with England Athletics standards (potentially via BSF).

Table 4 – Summary of synthetic turf pitch (STP) provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>Six full size STP facilities in Northumberland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berwick-on-Tweed Community High School, Berwick (sand based) • Morpeth Cricket Hockey & Tennis Club, Castle Morpeth (Sand based) • Sporting Club Cramlington, Blyth Valley (sand based) • Queen Elizabeth High School, Tynedale (sand based) • Prudhoe Football and Sports Centre, Tynedale (3G) • Hirst Welfare Centre, Wansbeck (3G) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are currently no full size STP facilities in the former authority of Alnwick • England Hockey has also identified a need for an STP facility in the former district • England Hockey has also expressed concern with regard to the development of 3G pitches as they are not suitable for hockey. • Provision of STPs per 1,000 population is below the national average • Northumberland requires a further four full size STPs to be in line with the national average 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop facilities at Alnwick Sporting Club via Football Foundation funding • Explore opportunities to provide a sand based STP that is suitable for hockey. • Provide floodlights at the facility at Queen Elizabeth High School • Develop sufficient STP facilities to bring Northumberland in line with the national average. Options include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - priority projects identified by Northumberland County FA for 2009 (Blyth Community College, Ponteland Sporting Club) - utilisation of Football Foundation/Rugby Football Union funding - opportunities to provide STPs on school sites via BSF - consider smaller training size STPs on school or other managed sites to serve rural areas . • Ensure that existing facilities are maintained to a high standard via the provision of appropriate sinking funds and ensure effective management arrangements are in place

Table 5 – Summary of health and fitness provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>52 health and fitness facilities in Northumberland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48% commercial • 27% education • 19% local authority • others are private/trust facilities <p>Northumberland has 15% of the region's health and fitness facilities and the highest number of facilities per 1,000 of all sub-regions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some accessibility issues within rural communities 	

Table 6 – Summary of indoor tennis provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>There are no indoor tennis facilities in Northumberland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LTA has identified a number of gaps in provision within the north east and is in the process of identifying a series of 'key sites' for development, one of which is likely to be in Northumberland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate the potential to develop an indoor tennis facility in Northumberland in conjunction with the LTA.

Table 7 – Summary of golf provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>There are 32 18-hole golf courses in Northumberland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 local authority • 16 private • 14 commercial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northumberland has 35% of the region's golf courses and the highest number of courses per 1,000 population of the four sub-regions. 	

Table 8 – Summary of indoor bowls provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>There are four indoor bowls facilities in Northumberland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swan Leisure Centre, North• Ashington Leisure Centre, South East• Concordia Leisure Centre, South East• Wentworth Leisure Centre, West	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilities are sometimes under utilised during the summer months when bowlers tend to move outdoors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore opportunities to use indoor bowling facilities for alternative purposes during the summer months (eg community dance sessions, conference/events etc)• Improve the marketing and promotion of indoor bowls facilities to maximise participation during the winter months and advertise alternative uses during the summer months.

Table 9 – Summary of grass pitch provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>Playing Pitch Strategies have been undertaken by each of the former district councils</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These Playing Pitch Strategies identify a shortfall in junior football pitches across the county • The former authority areas of Alnwick, Blyth Valley and Castle Morpeth have a shortfall of adult football pitches, whereas Wansbeck has a significant surplus • The number of rugby and cricket pitches within the County seems to be adequate • Several key issues are identified in relation to the quality and accessibility of local authority pitch provision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - poor quality changing and ancillary facilities - poor drainage which severely affects the quality of the playing surface - lack of dedicated female changing facilities - lack of floodlit facilities for training and competition - focus on creating multi pitch sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the issues outlined within the former district council Playing Pitch Strategies by exploring options for the development of grass pitches, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - priority projects identified by Northumberland County FA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alnwick Sporting Club - Ponteland - Morpeth Common - Hexham Duke House Wood (now on site) - Bomarsund Welfare - utilisation of Football Foundation/Rugby Football Union funding - opportunities to develop facilities on school sites via BSF. • The FA has sanctioned the use of 3G STP pitches for league competition and this option should therefore be explored when considering the future development of both grass and synthetic football pitch provision • The new authority should consider undertaking a playing pitch strategy for the whole of the county that is in line with 'Towards a Level Playing Field', Sport England's guidance document in relation to the production of Playing Pitch Strategies

Table 10 – Summary of outdoor sport provision

Current provision	Issues/gaps	Potential solutions
<p>There are a range of outdoor sports with strong existing club/facility infrastructures, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cycling (mountain biking) • equestrianism • canoeing • sailing • rowing • golf (see table 7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of outdoor sports within the county are currently operating in isolation from one another • There is an opportunity for Northumberland to use its unique landscape to differentiate itself from its neighbouring sub-regions and provide a high quality destination and centre of excellence for outdoor sports provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a number of opportunities that the county can build upon in relation to the provision of outdoor sports facilities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Canoe England has targeted the provision of one canoe trail per year going forward - development of two addition 'cycling hubs' at Hexham and Prudhoe in Tynedale - investment in Kielder Water and Forest Park, which could include improved facilities for sailing, cycling, walking etc - Northumberland College has plans to develop their Kirkley Hall Campus in Castle Morpeth to provide a centre of excellence for Modern Pentathlon - opportunity to use the 2012 PGTC to build on the existing archery clubs in Castle Morpeth and Wansbeck - investment in a Centre of Excellence for Disabled Riding in Castle Morpeth - investment in the facilities at Hexham Rowing and Queen Elizabeth High School Rowing Clubs • The new authority should take a coordinated approach to the development of these facilities with a view to providing a regionally/nationally significant infrastructure of outdoor facilities.

Facility development opportunities

Regional significance

- xii) At present there are no nationally recognised sports venues in Northumberland that provide for professional sport and there are only limited opportunities for the development of regionally significant facilities.
- xiii) Northumberland College's plans to provide a centre of excellence for the Modern Pentathlon could provide Northumberland with a venue of regional, if not national, significance.
- xiv) There are currently no facilities in England that focus solely on this discipline and the college's plans to make it central to the development of a specialist sport science qualification is an exciting development that could potentially bring increased focus to the county in terms of students, athletes, funding and facilities.

Sub-regional significance

- xv) There are several key challenges faced by Northumberland in relation to its future sports facility infrastructure, and thus its ability to achieve this vision.
- xvi) These are summarised in Table 1 above.

A local approach

- xvii) Due to Northumberland's geographic profile (ie its largely rural nature) access to sporting facilities can be an issue for a significant proportion of the population and, unlike more densely populated areas (eg Tyne & Wear), the provision of one sub-regional facility will not necessarily resolve these issues. Facility provision in Northumberland should therefore be considered at a much more local level.
- xviii) There is an opportunity to utilise the recent change to a single unitary authority to:
 - first, take a strategic view of facility provision across the county to identify priority sports and engage with schools, private providers and other community use spaces
 - second, adopt localised strategies which address the unique issues that exist in rural and urban communities.
- xix) In order to ensure that this approach is effective, there is a need for negotiations between Northumberland County Council, leisure trusts and education establishments with regard to improved access to school sites.
- xx) There is also an opportunity to use the largely rural nature of the County to differentiate it from the other sub-regions and provide facilities and activities that take advantage of the landscape (eg outdoor activities such as cycling, sailing, canoeing etc).

APPENDIX 1

Benchmark capital costs

Facility Type	Facility Details	Costs (£)
Sports Hall	1 court	£695,000
	4 court	£2,765,000
Pools	25m pool (5 lane)	£2,670,000
Changing Rooms	4 team changing pavilion	£565,000
Indoor Bowls Centre	6 lane	£1,555,000
	extra lane	£210,000
Indoor Tennis Centre	3 court	£1,790,000
	Extra court	£590,000
Outdoor Tennis Court	2 court, macadam, fenced and floodlit	£135,000
Grandstand	500 seats with no undercroft	£495,000
Skate Park	40 x18m fenced and floodlit	£115,000
Synthetic Turf Pitches	Sand based 100 x 64m fenced and floodlit	£600,000
	Rubber crumb 100 x 64m fenced and floodlit	£740,000
	Water based 100 x64m fenced and floodlit	£925,000
Grass Pitch	100 x64m	£80,000
Multi-use Games Areas	40 x 18m fenced and floodlit	£80,000
Athletics Track	6 lane floodlit	£1,150,000

The above are provided by the Building Cost Information Service (BCIS) and are based on the costs of providing good quality sports facilities. They are based on the cost of new schemes recently funded through the Lottery and updated to reflect forecast price indices.

It should be noted that they provide an estimated guide only and will be subject to variations depending on prevailing market conditions.