



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Playing Pitch Strategy 2021-2040

Foreword

Encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle is integral to our daily existence. Regular physical activity not only reduces the risk of severe health conditions but also positively impacts mental well-being.

The council's main priorities revolve around the health and well-being of residents, we aim to foster prosperity through meaningful physical activities, creating robust individuals and communities.

This strategy, developed collaboratively with National Governing Bodies and Sport England, underscores the importance of promoting good physical health. As part of a city-wide approach, the council plans to enhance pitch facilities, ensuring convenient access to high-quality, sustainable multi-purpose pitches.

This strategy serves as the foundation for identifying priority projects, guiding pitch improvements up until 2040. It forms the evidence base for securing funding contributions to realise the vision of an elevated pitch standard, providing residents with enhanced opportunities for participating in pitch-based sports throughout the city.

The strategy also emphasises the council's commitment to partnerships with National Governing Bodies and Sport England. Together, we aim to achieve the outlined priorities and recommendations in the strategy and action plan.

Councillor Jane Ashworth OBE
Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council



Introduction

The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) for Stoke-on-Trent which has been commissioned for Knight, Kavanagh & Page to complete on behalf to Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Building upon the preceding Assessment Report, it provides a clear, strategic framework for the maintenance and improvement of existing playing pitch and accompanying ancillary facilities up to 2040 (in line with the anticipated emerging Local Plan).

The PPS (2021-40) provides a framework and evidence for action to promote physical activity in the city through the provision, protection and enhancement of pitch-based sport and physical activity facilities.

Over recent years we can see real change in sports participation, emerging trends for greater use of artificial grass pitch, and the condition of local playing pitch surface quality. In addition, the demographics of the local population and future growth of the city have lead to the development of this strategy.

This document provides an executive summary main PPS which can be found at www.stoke.gov.uk/playingpitchstrategy

It provides an at-a-glance reference to the reader of the process undertaken to arrive at the vision, priorities and the action the council and external stakeholders will deliver over the next five years.

It must be noted that this is an annually updated strategy, through a Sport England recommended process; Stage E. This was completed in August 2023, to ensure the findings and recommendations are robust and accurate.

The Playing Pitch Strategy been produced in accordance with Sport England guidance and both have received sign off from National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and the wider Steering Group. The study covers the period up to 2040, in line with the Stoke-on-Trent Local Plan.

Vision

To achieve improved health and wellbeing of local residents and the transformational growth of the city, the vision...

“To create accessible, high quality and sustainable physical activity facilities which offer inclusive services for all.”



Why has the strategy been developed?

The Strategy has been developed to provide:

- A vision for the future improvement and prioritisation of playing pitches.
- A number of aims, identified by Sport England to help deliver the recommendations and actions.
- A series of city council specific strategic recommendations which provide a strategic framework for the improvement, maintenance, development and, as appropriate, rationalisation of the playing pitch stock.
- A series of sport by sport recommendations which provide a strategic framework for sport led improvements to provision.
- A prioritised area-by-area Action Plan to address key issues on a site-by-site basis.



Strategic Priorities

The Playing Pitch Strategy vision will be delivered in partnership with external partners. Joint work will focus on the three strategic priorities;

AIM 1 - To protect the existing supply of outdoor sport facilities where it is needed for meeting current and future needs

Recommendations:

- Ensure, that outdoor sport facilities are protected through the implementation of local planning policy.
- Secure tenure and access to sites for high quality, development minded clubs
- Maximise community use of education facilities

AIM 2 - To enhance outdoor sport facilities and ancillary facilities through improving quality and management of sites

Recommendations:

- Maintain quality and seek improvements where necessary
- Adopt a tiered approach (hierarchy of provision) to the management and improvement of sites
- Work in partnership with stakeholders to secure funding
- Secure developer contributions

AIM 3 - To provide new outdoor sport facilities where there is current or future demand to do so

Recommendations:

- Identify opportunities to add to the overall stock to accommodate both current and future demand
- Rectify quantitative shortfalls through the current stock



The Bigger Picture

Stronger Together

The council's corporate plan provides the overarching vision for the city which we call Stronger Together. It contains the following priorities:



The Stronger Together principle is embedded into the Playing Pitch Strategy. The Playing Pitch Strategy is also aligned and will support the delivery of the city's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, specifically its physical activity priority. Stronger Together and the suite of strategy that support it including the Playing Pitch Strategy are designed to support Stoke-on-Trent City Council to create a stronger city we can all be proud of.

This strategy delivers the Stronger Together vision, as it identifies existing and projected supply and demand for outdoor pitch sports facilities, in line with the draft local plan; enabling the council to proactively improve facilities, ensuring supply and demand remain in equilibrium in the city.

The strategy will inform planning decisions and assist with future funding applications for new and qualitative improvements to pitch facilities within the city over the next five years. These developments will enhance the sustainability of and the accessibility to quality sports pitches throughout the city and in turn contribute to the transformational vision of the city council whilst contributing to the increase of physical activity levels amongst residents.

The vision of this strategy will also enable the city council achieve the priorities set out in the Stoke-on-Trent Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the health and wellbeing vision in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA, 2019) to become ‘a healthy and successful city where children enjoy the best start in life and everyone will live longer and healthier lives with equal access to health and care services should they need them’.



Preparing the Playing Pitch Strategy

What is the Playing Pitch Strategy?

The Playing Pitch Strategy delivers the evidence required to ensure that sufficient land is available across the public, education, voluntary and commercial sectors to meet existing and projected future outdoor sport requirements. Its robust evidence base should inform and be implemented into planning policy and other relevant corporate strategies to enable local policies, planning and sport development criteria to work efficiently and effectively.

One of the core planning principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs. Section 8 of the NPPF deals specifically with the topic of healthy communities; it discusses the importance of access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation that can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities.

The NPPF also discusses assessments and the protection of “existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields”. As such, the Stoke-on-Trent PPS provides the evidence required to help protect, enhance and provide playing fields to ensure sufficient land is available to meet existing and projected future pitch requirements.



How is Playing Pitch Strategy developed?

The Playing Pitch Strategy has been developed using Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance. The guidance sets out a methodology to create a robust strategy. The approach comprises of 10 steps which are grouped into the following five stages:

- Stage A: Prepare and tailor the approach (Step 1)
- Stage B: Gather information and views on the supply of and demand for provision (Steps 2 & 3)
- Stage C: Assess the supply and demand information and views (Steps 4, 5 & 6)
- Stage D: Develop the strategy (Steps 7 & 8)
- Stage E: Deliver the strategy and keep it robust and up to date (Steps 9 & 10)



Scope, findings & conclusions

of Playing Pitch Strategy needs assessment

Area of Study

The study area comprises of the full local authority area, with analysis areas (or sub areas) also used to allow for a more localised analysis in addition to the analysis for Stoke-on-Trent as a whole. In addition, cross-boundary movement is also recognised, most commonly between neighbouring local authorities such as Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands and Stafford.



Sports within scope of the assessment

To understand and assess the need for playing pitches within the study area the sports and playing surfaces covered by the Playing Pitch Strategy are;

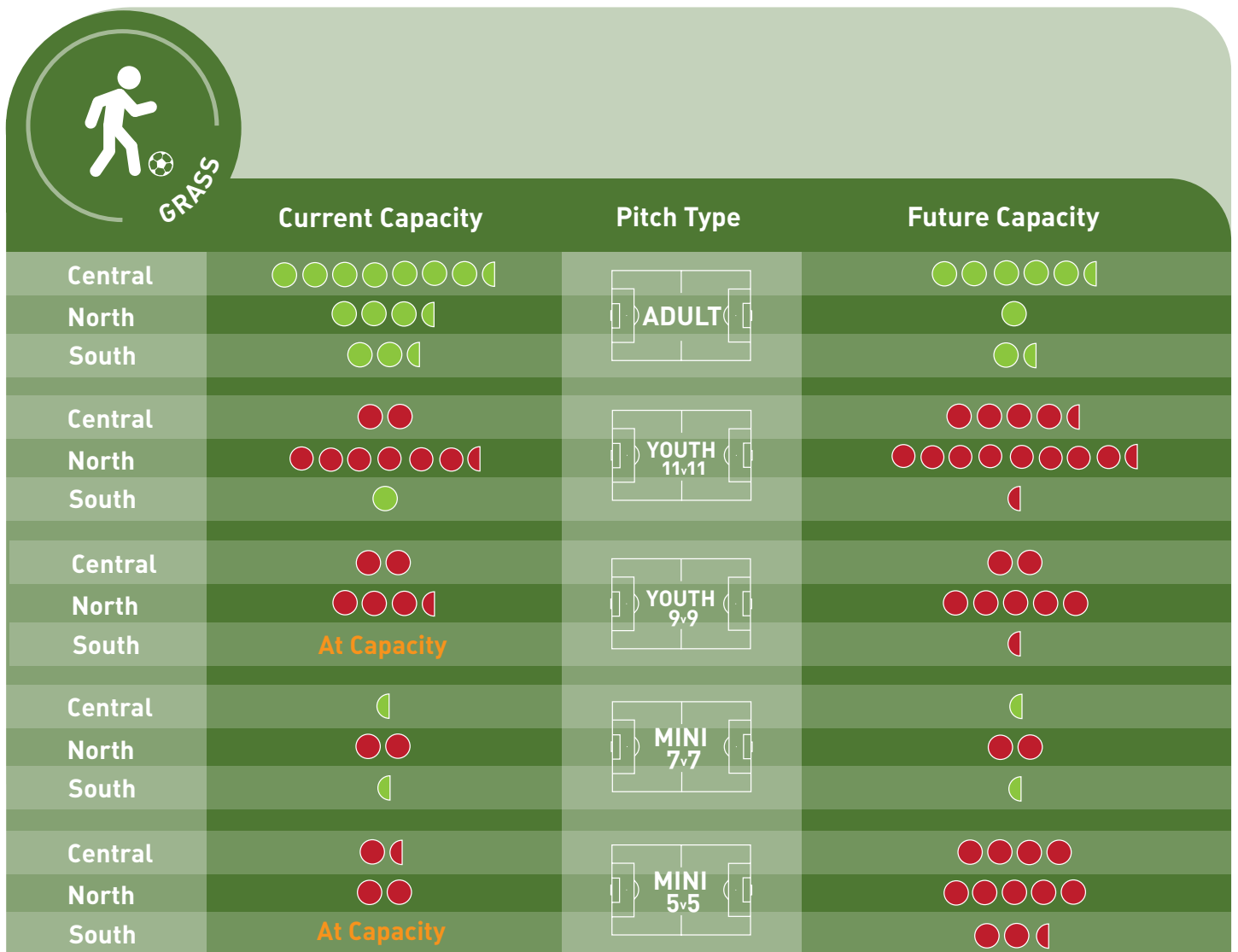
- Football pitches
- Third Generation (3G) pitches
- Cricket pitches
- Rugby union pitches
- Hockey pitches (sand/water-based AGPs)
- Golf courses
- Bowling greens
- Tennis courts
- Other sports (cycling, American football, and Touch/Tag rugby)

Overview of Playing Pitch Capacity

The below highlights the shortfall of pitches across the pitch types identified within this strategy, taking into consideration current and future demand.

Match Play Equivalent

The key unit of measurement used within the Playing Pitch Strategy is Match Play equivalent. This is because pitches have a limit of how much play they can accommodate over a certain period of time before their quality, and in turn their use, is adversely affected. As the main usage of pitches is for matches, the comparable unit used in the assessment is match equivalent sessions. The use of Match Play equivalent allows the current and future needs for pitch provision to be calculated and priorities and actions to be identified and set.



Key: Red - Under Supply Amber - At Capacity Green - Spare Capacity



| | Current Capacity | Pitch Type | Future Capacity |
|---------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Central | At Capacity | FULL SIZE | At Capacity |
| North | | | At Capacity |
| South | At Capacity | | At Capacity |



For cricket pitches, it is appropriate to look at the number of match equivalent sessions over the course of a season.

| | Current Capacity | Pitch Type | Future Capacity |
|---------|------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Central | | SATURDAY | |
| North | | | |
| South | Shortfall of 18 | | Shortfall of 42 |
| Central | | SUNDAY | |
| North | | | |
| South | Shortfall of 18 | | Shortfall of 24 |
| Central | | MIDWEEK | |
| North | | | |
| South | Shortfall of 18 | | Shortfall of 22 |

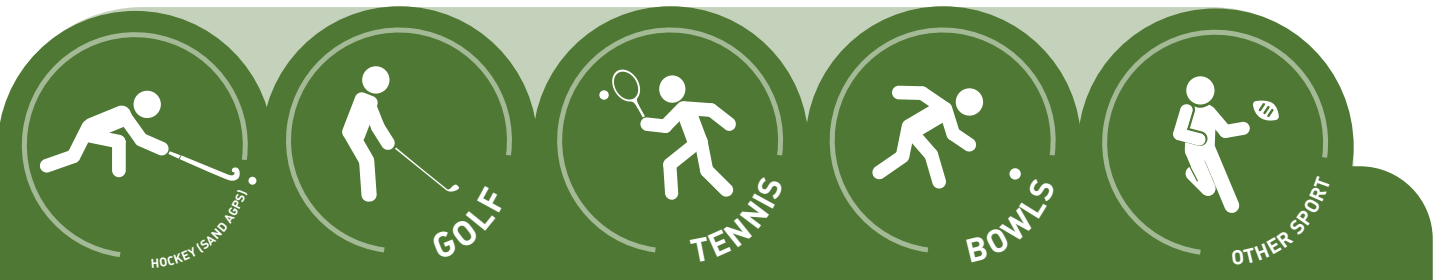


| | Current Capacity | Pitch Type | Future Capacity |
|---------|------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Central | At Capacity | SENIOR | At Capacity |
| North | At Capacity | | At Capacity |
| South | | | |

[1] MES - match equivalent sessions per week (per season for cricket)

[2] Based on accommodating 38 teams on one full size pitch

Key: Red - Under Supply Amber - At Capacity Green - Spare Capacity



| | Current Capacity | Pitch Type | Future Capacity |
|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| HOCKEY (SAND AGPS) | Spare capacity | FULL SIZE, FLOODLIT | Spare capacity |
| GOLF | Sufficient levels | FACILITIES | Sufficient levels |
| TENNIS | Spare capacity | COURTS | Spare capacity |
| BOWLS | Spare capacity | GREENS | Spare capacity |
| OTHER SPORTS | Spare capacity | PITCHES | Spare capacity |

Summary of Supply and Demand

Current position (2021) - existing position for all pitch sports is either that demand is being met or that there is a shortfall.

Future position (up to 2040) - future position shows the exacerbation of current shortfalls and the creation of deficits for some pitches and for some areas where demand is currently being met.

For the majority of the sports covered within the needs assessment there is currently sufficient supply of pitches. However, for football, cricket and rugby union the assessment has identified shortfalls in the supply of pitches related to the quality of existing provision, growth within each sport (for example youth and mini age groups), and projected growth of the population.

Conclusions

Based on current and future demand for playing pitch within the area of study and the sports and playing surfaces within scope of the Playing Pitch Strategy the following action is required;

- A need to protect all existing playing pitch provision until demand is met; or there is a requirement to replace any lost provision to an equal or better quantity and quality before it is lost (in accordance with the NPPF and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy).
- The shortfalls evidenced are relatively minimal; for rugby union and football in particular, it is considered that most shortfalls can generally be met through the better utilisation of existing provision, such as via pitch re-configuration, improving quality and encouraging or enabling access to unused/unavailable provision.
- There are current shortfalls of 3G pitches, rugby union pitches, cricket squares and youth football pitches, whilst additional shortfalls arise on mini 5v5 football pitches when accounting for future demand.
- The shortfall of 3G pitches that can only be met through increased provision.



Strategic Recommendations

Key to the delivery of the PPS, Local Plan and the council wider transformation programme, will be a coordinated action to improve the accessibility and quality of pitches. The recommended options to achieve this are:

Qualitative Improvements to existing pitches to increase match play

Including high quality drainage system under the pitch, French drains, top soil and seeding, plus an annual maintenance regime to maintain the good standard.

Development of new facilities; multi-sport hub sites

Create new facilities to accommodate the demand, incorporating artificial grass pitches, fencing, flood lighting, changing facilities and car parking.



Reinstate Lapsed and Disused Pitches

There are a number of lapsed pitches in the city, including Anchor Road pitches, Woodhead Road and The Croft Sports Ground. The majority of these sites are disused due to poor quality, however, with similar pitch and facility improvements as listed in point 1, these sites could be reinstated to help meet current and future demand, as they would provide additional provision.

Improve access to existing sites – Education facilities

A number of education facilities within the city have high quality pitch facilities, including 3G pitches. Community usage is not currently maximised within these settings. Community Use Agreements (CUA's) could be implemented to ensure these facilities can be accessed by the community during peak periods, including weekends. This would help to alleviate the shortfall of pitch provision across the city.

Furthermore, to ensure the financial viability of grass pitches over the local plan period, up to 2040, the PPS proposes a tiered approach to the management and improvement of outdoor facility sites and associated provision. This will support the grass pitch improvements, the development of additional pitch facilities and the provision of pitch maintenance at key and local sites, if the options were pursued.

Delivery

By addressing the issues identified in the Assessment Report and using the strategic framework presented in the Strategy, the current and future sporting and recreational needs of the City can be satisfied.



Partners

The council will be working with the following partners to deliver the Playing Pitch Strategy.

- Sport England
- Football Foundation
- Staffordshire Football Association
- England and Wales Cricket Board
- Staffordshire Cricket
- Rugby Football Union
- British Crown Green Bowling
- England Hockey Board
- Lawn Tennis Association
- British Cycling
- England Golf

The council and these partners will annually engage regularly under the guidance set by Sport England's to deliver the Playing Pitch Strategy Action Plan and to ensure the strategy remains robust and usable over the local plan period, up to 2040.

Sport Specific Recommendations from the PPS

Recommendations for the North:

| Sport | Priority Projects – identified in the PPS |
|-------------|---|
| Football | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Improve pitch quality at key sites to alleviate overplay, especially at key, poor quality and/or overplayed sites such as Kingsgrove Athletic FC Development Centre, the Hardman Centre and Trubshaw Cross Lads & Dads. • Improve security of tenure at key sites such as Burnwood Community School, Milton Primary Academy and Norton Cricket Club & Miners Welfare Institute. • Consider asset transfer of sites to clubs. • Enable use of currently unavailable sites. • Improve changing facilities where required. |
| 3G pitches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Establish three additional 3G pitches, potentially at a single location via a hub site development, through converting sand-based AGPs or via existing aspirations (or a combination). • Ensure all existing pitches have a sinking fund in place. • Ensure all existing pitches remain on the FA register to host competitive matches. |
| Cricket | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Alleviate overplay at Sandyford Cricket Club. • Improve quality at Sandyford Cricket Club and sustain quality of other squares. • Improve changing facilities where required. |
| Rugby union | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No action required. |

| Sport | Priority Projects – identified in the PPS |
|--------|--|
| Hockey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect at least one full size sand based AGP for potential future community hockey needs. • Ensure pitches remain sustainable if and when additional 3G pitches are established. • Consider conversion of pitches to 3G to ensure long-term sustainability and to reduce 3G shortfalls. |
| Golf | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision that is in use. • Consider future uses of Goldenhill Golf Course. |
| Bowls | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Ensure any development of lapsed/disused provision meets Sport England requirements. • Improve quality at Tunstall Park. |
| Tennis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Seek to improve park courts such as at Tunstall Park and Burslem Park via implementation of LTA products. |

Recommendations for the Central:

| Priority Projects – Identified in the PPS | |
|---|--|
| Football | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Improve pitch quality at key sites to alleviate overplay, especially at key, poor quality and/or overplayed sites such as Eastwood Hanley FC, The Discovery Academy and FC Hanley. • Improve security of tenure at key sites such as Birches Head Academy. • Consider asset transfer of sites to clubs. • Enable use of currently unavailable sites. • Improve changing facilities where required. |
| 3G pitches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Ensure all existing pitches have a sinking fund in place. • Ensure all existing pitches remain on the FA register to host competitive matches. • Consider installation of an additional pitch if three cannot be provided in the North Analysis, or if enough demand can be evidenced; this could be achieved via the creation of a hub site or via existing aspirations. |
| Cricket | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Alleviate overplay at J & G Meakin Cricket Club. • Improve quality at Fenton Cricket Club and sustain quality of other squares. • Improve changing facilities where required. |
| Rugby union | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No action required. |
| Hockey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No action required. |

| Sport | | Priority Projects – identified in the PPS |
|--------|--|--|
| Bowls | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Ensure any development of lapsed/disused provision meets Sport England requirements. |
| Tennis | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Seek to improve park courts such as at Bucknall Park, Fenton Park, Northwood Park, Mount Pleasant Park and Hanley Park via implementation of LTA products. |

Recommendations for the South:

| Sport | | Priority Projects – identified in the PPS |
|------------|--|--|
| Football | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Improve pitch quality at key sites, especially those that are poor quality (none are overplayed). Examples include Bakersfield/Poplars Drive and Trentham Community Sports Centre. • Where pitches remain overplayed, seek the transfer of demand. • Improve security of tenure at key sites such as Florence Colliery Social Welfare Centre, Ormiston Sir Stanley Matthews Academy, St Thomas More Catholic Academy, and Trentham Community Sports Centre. • Consider asset transfer of sites to clubs. • Enable use of currently unavailable sites. • Improve changing facilities where required. |
| 3G pitches | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect provision. • Ensure all existing pitches have a sinking fund in place. • Ensure all existing pitches remain on the FA register to host competitive matches. |

| Sport | Priority Projects – Identified in the PPS |
|-------------|---|
| 3G pitches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider installation of an additional pitch if demand can be evidenced or if future growth requires such provision. |
| Cricket | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect provision. Alleviate overlay at Longton Cricket Club and Hanford Cricket Club Improve quality at Hanford Cricket Club and sustain quality of other squares. Improve changing facilities where required. |
| Rugby union | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect provision. Improve quality at Longton and Trentham rugby clubs to reduce overlay. Explore the feasibility of increasing floodlighting at the sites. Consider pitch and ancillary enhancements at Trentham Rugby Club via potential S106 contributions. |
| Hockey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide the pitch at Trentham Community Sports Centre to a good quality and ensure long-term security of tenure for North Stafford HC. |
| Bowls | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect provision. Ensure any development of lapsed/disused provision meets Sport England requirements. |
| Tennis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect provision. Seek to improve park courts such as at Longton Park and Hanford Park via implementation of LTA products. |

The full list of site specific recommendations can be found in the Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan Document: www.stoke.gov.uk/playingpitchstrategy

