

Sunderland Core Strategy and Development Plan (CSDP)

**Statement of Common Ground as agreed
between Sunderland City Council and
Sport England**

March 2019

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Common Ground has been prepared jointly between Sunderland City Council (SCC) and Sport England (SE).
- 1.2 The Statement sets out the confirmed points of agreement between the Council, and SE with regard to the Park Life Programme and CSDP Sites HGA6 Rickleton and HGA8 Fulwell.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In October 2014 a report was published by the Football Association (FA) Commission that examined the need to encourage more participation in football and develop better grassroots facilities. The FA recognises that this will be an on-going problem due to grassroots football's over-reliance on publicly owned facilities and grass pitches that are publicly owned. Due to current financial pressures, council budgets are struggling to continue to subsidise the maintenance of football pitches as in previous years, this is already evident with a general decline in the quality of facilities.
- 2.2 In order to arrest this decline, the FA Commission's objectives are to:
 - Reduce football's reliance on Council subsidies;
 - Build significantly more Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP); and
 - Build a sustainable model to make this change happen.
- 2.3 To deliver its ambitions the FA Commission believes a new investment, ownership and management model for grassroots facilities is needed. The radical new approach involves building a number of football 'Hub' facilities to promote the participation in, and education about, the game and the creation of new, high quality AGPs.
- 2.4 SCC have been working alongside the Football Foundation (FF) and SE to prepare a bid for the FA Park Life Programme. The proposal is fully supported by SE, the FF and more locally Durham FA and affiliated football leagues.
- 2.5 In identifying the city's needs for 'Hub' facilities an FA modelling exercise was undertaken to map current and future participation requirements in the city against existing and potential new facilities, a football/ pitch blueprint was produced. This blueprint identified the 'appropriate' number of core football 'Hubs' at which the city's football demands can be met by the provision of high quality AGPs. Each football 'Hub' differs depending on local circumstances and needs, in Sunderland there is a need for three 'Hubs', each 'Hub' will have a different offer and quantum of grass and AGP pitches.

- 2.6 In addition, to inform the Parklife Programme bid, the city's current Playing Pitch Plan (PPP) has recently been updated and developed to include an overarching, needs driven, strategic plan for the city. The PPP provides an overview of demand and supply issues associated with pitch requirements in the following sports - football, cricket, rugby union, rugby league, hockey, tennis and bowls. A comprehensive supply and demand assessment was undertaken in consultation with a range of stakeholders including sports clubs, schools, further education providers and National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGB's).
- 2.7 The PPP indicates that following the development of the Parklife Hub sites it is possible that some football sites will become surplus to requirements and subject to various consents (Planning, SE etc) could be disposed of, thereby releasing capital receipts for the Council and covering the cost of the initial capital investment. The PPP is unable to predict which of the city's sites would become surplus to requirements. There are 47 currently used football pitch sites in Sunderland. The PPP also identifies 34 lapsed / disused sites of which the Council has identified 11 already for development
- 2.8 Site HGA6 Rickleton is one of the 47 currently used football pitch sites. Site HGA8 Fulwell is one of the 34 lapsed / disused sites. Both these sites are currently located within the Green Belt and the NPPF indicates that when undertaking a Green Belt review the Council should be satisfied that the Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period, as the Council is proposing revisions to the Green Belt boundaries as part of the CSDP and these two sites may become surplus to requirement early in the plan period, it is considered prudent to propose their removal from the Green Belt as part of the CSDP. If they were not considered as potential Green Belt releases at this stage of plan making, it could be several decades before they could be considered for development through a future Green Belt Review. The NPPF indicates that when revising Green Belt boundaries the Local Plan should have regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the Plan period.
- 2.9 Policy SS2 of the CSDP proposes to allocate the Southern Area Playing Field site in Washington (HGA6) as a Housing Growth Area for approximately 200 new homes. Similarly, Policy SS4 proposes to allocate land at Fulwell (HGA8) as a Housing Growth Area for approximately 80 new homes.

3.0 SE Representations to Publication Draft CSDP

- 3.1 In June 2018, the Council published the Publication draft of the CSDP for statutory consultation under regulation 19 of the Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 3.2 In response to this statutory consultation, SE submitted a formal response to the draft plan on 18 July 2018. A copy of this response can be found at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 The response detailed that SE objects to the plan for the following reasons:

- That although it is acknowledged that the successful implementation of the Parklife project in Sunderland might involve some playing fields becoming surplus to requirements, it is premature to speculate which playing fields might become surplus until teams have migrated across. Where teams leave good quality playing fields to use Parklife Sites, it is possible that former sites will be utilised by teams moving to them from poorer quality sites;
- HGA6 (Rickleton) and HGA8 (Fulwell) should be removed as an allocation unless they are identified as being surplus to requirement through an up-to-date Playing Pitch Strategy or the Council is able to identify suitable replacement playing field provision; and
- The Plan is not supported by an up-to-date Built Sports Facilities Strategy.

3.4 In order to address these concerns, the Council have been working together with SE and have subsequently agreed to several proposed modifications to the CSDP and supporting evidence base to satisfy the concerns raised.

3.5 Subject to these changes, SE accept that their objections to the Plan would be met.

4.0 Agreed Matters

4.1 The PPP will be updated, in consultation with SE, two years after the final Hub site in the city opens in order to identify any sites which have become surplus to requirement as a result of the opening of the sports Hubs. SE accepts that a period of two years after the opening of the final Hub would be sufficient for the impact of Parklife programme on local pitch demand within Sunderland to be assessed and this allows for one full football season for the Hubs to become established.

4.2 Should the updated PPP identify the Southern Areas Playing Fields site at Washington (HGA6) and the currently disused site at Fulwell (HGA8) as being surplus to requirement, it is agreed that the sites can be brought forward for development in accordance with their allocation in the CSDP. Surplus in this context is defined by Sport England's playing field policy exception E1. For a playing field to be considered as surplus to requirements the PPP must show that there is a surplus of pitch capacity across all sports (and age groups) in the catchment (Washington), both now and for the lifespan of the Local Plan.

Should it not be possible to prove that exception E1 pertains to either site, then it will be necessary for the Council to replace the playing field in accordance with Sport England's playing field policy exception E4 prior to the commencement of any development.

Replacing playing field in accordance with exception E4 is a complex matter that would require significant collaborative work between SCC, SE and the affected NGBs. Further detail on how exception is interpreted can be found at the following location;

<https://www.sportengland.org/media/13458/playing-fields-policy-and-guidance.pdf>

SCC and SE acknowledge that meeting E4 in respect of this case requires that;

- Dependent on the timing of the respective sites' development, playing field at both Rickleton and Plessey's (up to a total of 11.7ha) will need to be replaced in Washington
- Playing field at Fulwell (4.6Ha) would need to be replaced in Sunderland North
- It is not possible to replace playing field by resuming use of land last used as playing field
- Rickleton was identified as a Hub site in the PPP and those characteristics would need to be replicated in any replacement provision.

4.3 The following modifications are therefore proposed to the CSDP, which would satisfactorily address the issues identified above:

Policy HGA6 Rickleton should:

- i. deliver approximately 200 new homes;
- ii. maintain wildlife and green infrastructure corridors to the south;
- iii. provide a greenspace buffer to minimise impact on the adjacent Grade II Lambton Castle Registered Park and Garden and priority species and protected habitat in the locality;
- iv. retain all healthy trees and hedgerows and create a central greenspace into the site that will upgrade the existing scrub land and mature natural features;
- v. provide greenspace improvements to Rickleton Park to compensate for the greenspace loss;
- vi. be of high architectural quality and designed with consideration to the village character on the northern and eastern edges;
- vii. provide pedestrian connections from the site westwards and northwards to Bonemill Lane and to connect to the existing public Right of Way on the north eastern boundary; and
- viii. include vehicle access from Bramhall Drive and provide mitigation as necessary to the road junctions at Bonemill Lane, Picktree Lane, A183, A1(M) and A182.

Development of the site can only take place subject to an up-to-date Playing Pitch needs assessment, prepared in consultation with Sport England, identifying the pitches as being surplus to requirement in accordance with Sport England's playing field policy exception E1 or where the pitches can be re-provided in accordance with Sport England's playing field policy exception E4.

Policy H8 Fulwell should:

- i. deliver approximately 80 new homes;
- ii. create a new defensible Green Belt boundary to the west and north of the site;
- iii. maintain wildlife and green infrastructure corridors to the north and limit any impact on the areas landscape character through sensitive boundary treatments;
- iv. retain the mature tree belts on the western and southern edges of the site, and incorporate greenspace into the site for amenity purposes;
- v. provide greenspace improvements to Fulwell Quarries to compensate for area greenspace loss in the locality;
- vi. ensure that a Habitats Regulations Assessment is undertaken and appropriate mitigation provided;

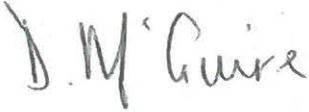
- vii. be of high architectural quality and designed to respect the local vernacular and to key views, including the setting of the WW1 Acoustic Mirror Scheduled Ancient Monument and setting of Grade II listed Fulwell Mill and Lime Kilns;
- viii. provide pedestrian/cycleway connections through the site and link to routes to the west and the wider area; and
- ix. include vehicle access to the east to connect to Newcastle Road, and carry out further highway improvements as necessary.

Development of the site can only take place subject to an up-to-date Playing Pitch needs assessment, prepared in consultation with Sport England, identifying the pitches as being surplus to requirement in accordance with Sport England's playing field policy exception E1 or where the pitches can be re-provided in accordance with Sport England's playing field policy exception E4.

- 4.3 All parties agree that the Sunderland City Council's Indoor Sports Facilities Assessment Report (December 2015) which forms part of the submitted evidence base, is an up-to-date Built Sports Facilities Assessment.

5.0 Statement of Common Ground

Signed on behalf of Sunderland City Council		
Name and position	Signature	Date
Peter McIntyre Executive Director of Economy and Place		22nd March 19

Signed on behalf of Sport England		
Name and position	Signature	Date
David McGuire Planning Manager		22 nd March 2019