

Artificial Grass Pitch Strategy December 2015

1.0: Introduction

The adopted Gloucester Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) sets out a vision for playing pitches in the City, which is:

'To provide an accessible, high quality and sustainable network of outdoor sports facilities, which provide opportunities for all residents to access good sport, physical activity and recreational facilities'.

The 'Assessment Report' and PPS show that a suitable number and type of Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) will be critical in delivering this vision.

This Artificial Grass Pitch Strategy (AGPS) has been prepared jointly by the City Council, the Football Association, Rugby Football Union and England Hockey to set out the preferred approach for the delivery of AGPs in Gloucester. It has also been informed by responses provided to the public consultation on the AGP Scenario Paper, held in the Autumn of 2015.

2.0: Artificial Grass Pitches

There are several surface types that fall into the category of Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP). The three main groups are rubber crumb (third generation turf 3G), sand (filled or dressed) and water based.

Competitive football can take place on 3G surfaces that have been FA or FIFA certified and appear on The FA 3G Football Turf Pitch (FTP) register <http://3g.thefa.me.uk/>. A growing number of 3G pitches are now used for competitive match play at and below the Conference North and South (Step 2) level at present. Any new 3G being constructed for Step 3 and below must be built to meet the FIFA 1* performance standard, for Step 2 and above the FIFA 2* standard must be met. Football training can take place on sand and water based surfaces and whilst is not the preferred option it does serve an offer to football.

Hockey is played predominantly on sand-based/filled AGPs. Competitive play is limited on 3G pitches; 40mm pitches which meet the FIH performance standard may be suitable, in some instances, for beginner training, or low level competitive matches are an alternative to the preferred traditional sand AGPs. However, these would be highly unlikely to meet the needs of hockey players in Gloucester and 40mm pitches are also not the preferred option for The FA or England Hockey. There is a need therefore to maintain a suitable number of sand-based/filled AGPs to maintain and support the growth of hockey in the City.

World Rugby's 'Performance Specification for Artificial Grass Pitches for Rugby', more commonly known as 'Regulation 22', which provides the necessary technical detail to produce pitch systems that are appropriate for rugby union (this is also adopted by rugby league). The artificial surface standards identified in Regulation 22 allows matches to be played on surfaces that meet the standard. Full contact activity, including tackling, rucking, mauling and lineouts can take place.

A summary of pitch types is provided at Table 1.

Surface	Category	Comments
Rubber crumb	Long Pile 3G (60mm with shock pad)	Preferred Rugby surface – can also meet football's standard - must comply with World Rugby type 22, requires a minimum of 60mm.
Rubber crumb	Long Pile 3G (55-60mm)	Preferred football surface (with or without shock pad – as long as it meets the relevant performance standard) - Acceptable surface for some competitive football as long as it meets the FIFA 1* performance standard
Rubber crumb	Short Pile 3G (40mm)	Acceptable surface for some competitive football as long as it meets the FIFA 1* performance standard
Sand	Sand Filled	Competitive hockey and football training
Sand	Sand Dressed	Preferred hockey surface and suitable for football training
Water	Water based	Preferred hockey surface and suitable for football training if irrigated.

Table 1: AGP type and sport suitability

3.0: Artificial Grass Pitch provision

Table 2 provides a summary of the existing supply of AGPs identified in Gloucester as of December 2015.

There are four full size AGPs in the City, as well as two at Hartpury College (outside the study area) which are considered to accommodate a significant proportion of demand from within the City. However, there is no FA or World Rugby certified AGP within Gloucester suitable for competitive play, though Hartpury College has one of each.

Two smaller AGPs at Abbeydale Community Centre and Waterwells Playing Field serve the training and five-a-side needs of local clubs and groups.

Appendix 1 identifies the location of all AGPs in the City, including those which are not full-size. It also shows the location of Blackbridge Playing Field as a potential location for new AGPs.

Site name	Ownership/ management	No. of pitches / Size	Pitch type / Age	Certification	Non-Technical Assessment*
Oxstalls Sports Park	Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust	1 pitch 40m x 30m 1,200 sq m	Sand Dressed 1996 (refurb 2012)	None	One standard quality sand dressed pitch with floodlights, resurfaced in 2012. Used intensively by Gloucester City HC for matches and training as well by Cleevillians HC. Much competition with football training demand.
Severn Vale School	School	1 pitch 100m x 60m 6,000 sq m	Sand Filled 1994	None	Standard quality sand filled surface well in excess of 10 years old and requiring replacement. Currently no hockey use and instead used significantly for football by both school and community clubs.
St Peters Roman Catholic High School	School	1 pitch 110m x 70m 7,700 sq m	Sand Dressed 2003	None	Standard quality sand dressed pitch with floodlighting in need of surface replacement. Used by Gloucester City HC as an alternate venue.
University Of Gloucestershire (Oxstalls Campus)	University	1 pitch 100m x 60m 6,000 sq m	Sand Filled 2002	None	Standard quality sand filled pitch with floodlighting. Owned by University of Gloucestershire. In excess of 10 years old and therefore requires resurfacing. Mainly used by student teams for training and BUCS hockey matches on Wednesday afternoons with no further capacity available. Plans for this pitch to be lost within current plans for development of the site to accommodate the University's Business School.
Hartpury College (outside of Gloucester City)	College	1 pitch 120m x 75m 9,000 sq m	Long Pile 3G (65mm), shock pad 2012	World Rugby Reg 22	Standard quality.
Hartpury College (outside of Gloucester City)	College	1 110m x 60m 6,600 sq m	Medium Pile 3G (55-60mm) 2005		Poor quality.

Table 2: Full size AGPs in Gloucester

*** Full 'Non-Technical Assessment' available in the Draft Gloucester Playing Pitch Strategy 'Assessment Report'**

4.0: Current position and key issues

Football (3G AGPs)

- There are currently no full size 3G Football Turf Pitches (FTP) within Gloucester. The FA model suggests that there is a current shortfall of three full size 3G FTPs to meet demand for football training. Consideration needs to be given to any football use that currently takes place on sand based pitches.
- There is also a growing demand for all age groups to play affiliated matches on 3G FTPs, particularly at youth level, but in this instance also at adult level where there is the greatest issue with capacity due to quality and shortfall of grass pitches.
- From the 2014/15 season only 3G FTPs with a valid performance test and listed on the FA Register can be used for competitive play. At present, there are no 3G FTPs located within Gloucester and therefore no AGPs have undergone the FA's performance test to allow league competitive football to be played. Please note this is the responsibility of the pitch provider and has an associated cost of circa £1,500. Once a site passes the performance test and adheres to a quality maintenance schedule the facility can appear on The FA register for 3 years.

Hockey (Sand AGPs)

- There are currently four AGPs suitable for competitive hockey within Gloucester; Oxstalls Sports Park, Severn Vale School, St Peters High School and University Of Gloucestershire (Oxstalls Campus).
- Three are used for hockey and Severn Vale School is currently solely used for football (community use).
- St Peter's Roman Catholic High School and Severn Vale School scored the joint lowest for quality (both 56%) of the four pitches and given that the surfaces are over 10 years old will require refurbishment/replacement within the next few years. Exact timescales are to be confirmed and subject to the schools securing sufficient funding.
- Overall Gloucester is adequately provided for with regards to AGPs suitable for hockey matches at present. However, access to these pitches for hockey training is a key issue as all AGPs are operating at capacity midweek primarily due to football training (given the absence of suitable 3G pitches for football).
- There is a need for three full size hockey compliant AGPs to service current and future demand for competitive hockey in Gloucester, if 3G provision is provided to cater for football's need and to allow hockey participation to grow.

Rugby union (3G AGPs)

- There is no World Rugby certified AGP within Gloucester suitable for competitive play, although Hartpury College has one (just outside the study area).
- Overall there are insufficient grass pitches in Gloucester to service current and future rugby demand, totalling a future requirement for a further 51.25 senior and 4.75 mini pitch match equivalent sessions.

5.0: Summary of AGP shortfalls

Table 3 sets out current and future demand for AGPs in Gloucester, as determined by the draft PPS.

Sport	Current demand	Future demand (2037)
Football (3G AGPs)	Potential shortfall of up to three 3G pitches based on FA model for training.	Potential further shortfalls based on FA model for accommodating competitive play.
Rugby union (3G AGPs)	Current shortfall of at least one rugby union compliant 3G pitch	Future shortfall of union compliant 3G pitches
Hockey (Sand AGPs)	Current competitive demand is being met and can be accommodated on three sand AGPs. Current training demand is at capacity due to use of existing hockey-compliant facilities by football/rugby clubs.	Future demand may not be met in light of potential pitch loss at the University.

Table 3: Identified AGP shortfalls from the PPS Assessment

6.0: Potential plans affecting AGP provision in Gloucester

- University of Gloucestershire proposes the redevelopment of its Oxstalls Campus which is likely to include the loss of the existing sand-based AGP, but with two new 3G pitches being proposed at Oxstalls Sports Park/Bishop's College
- Proposals for development of a 'hub site' at Blackbridge Playing Field which could accommodate provision of an AGP.
- Age of playing surface (sand-filled carpets) at both Severn Vale School and St Peters Catholic High School which will require replacement in the short/medium term.
- Amount of football and hockey play at both Severn Vale School and St Peters Catholic High School, and the impact this has on the availability of those pitches for other sports. Also the amount of time available for play by the community outside of curriculum use.

7.0: Recommendations from Draft Playing Pitch Strategy

Football (3G AGPs)

- Increase provision of 3G FTPs in the City (current shortfall of up to three full size).
- Develop a 3G FTP Strategy for the City which takes into consideration current proposals and optimal strategic location to effectively service all areas of the City.
- In partnership with EH potentially look to convert one sand-based AGP to a 3G surface whilst maintaining adequate provision within the City to accommodate hockey demand.
- Retain some use of sand AGPs for football training in order to ensure continued sustainability of existing provision.
- In a phased approach, look to transfer 25% of youth football (mini and 9v9) onto 3G for match play and establish a mix of 3G and grass pitch use, in order to better achieve sustainability. The long term aim would be to transfer 50% of mini and 9v9 match play to 3G FTPs.
- Ensure that new 3G pitches are tested and subsequently FA registered. In addition, ensure that future 3G pitches are used to maximum potential to allow for future back to back programming of mini/youth matches at peak times.
- Ensure that sinking funds (formed by annually setting aside money over time ready for surface replacement when required – FA recommend £25k per annum in today's market) are in place to maintain 3G FTP quality in the long term.

Hockey (Sand AGPs)

- Prioritise and retain three sand-based AGPs to accommodate current and future hockey demand and to ensure continued sustainability.
- Existing sand-dressed AGP at Oxstalls Sports Park to be protected for long term hockey use.
- Ensure pitch quality is of a good standard and ensure that sinking funds are in place to maintain sand AGP pitch quality in the long term.
- Maximise use of existing sand-based AGPs to accommodate (as a priority) Gloucester clubs' training and competitive demand through effective programming.
- Work with Gloucester City HC to help facilitate membership growth and ensure sufficient access to Oxstalls Sports Park.
- Work with stakeholders in potential new 3G FTP developments to fully determine capacity that may be made available through transfer of football demand to new sites.

Rugby union (3G AGPs)

- Work to reduce training on grass match pitches, through access to dedicated floodlit training areas, including options to provide full size 3G pitches in partnership with the FA, which are World Rugby compliant to help address shortfalls.

Overall summary

- Providing new 3G FTPs for football could (managed/programmed appropriately) free up capacity to accommodate future/unmet training demand for hockey.
- If the sand AGP was to be lost at the University it would result in three remaining AGPs to service hockey at Oxstalls Sports Park, St Peters High School (in need of replacement) and Severn Vale School (in need of replacement). Without like for like replacement of a sand-based AGP for hockey, all three remaining AGPs would need to be retained/protected for hockey use. However, hockey use would need to be maximised/negotiated at St Peters High School and Severn Vale School.
- The quality of the AGPs at St Peters High School and Severn Vale School would need to be improved to ensure suitability for long term hockey use.

- The timing of the loss of any sand AGP and the provision of new 3G FTPs is also a critical factor to allow users to be displaced and accommodated without disruption to provision.

8.0: Preferred AGP/FTP Strategy

The priority for the City Council, as expressed through the Playing Pitch Strategy, is that the provision of AGPs should be strategically located so as to take into account emerging proposals and that these AGPs should be distributed so as to effectively service all areas of the City. The PPS further recommends that the Council adopts a tiered hierarchy of provision, including the identification of ‘hub’ sites. These which would be strategically located, are likely to be multi-sport sites with associated facilities, and would accommodate at least three grass pitches and at least one AGP.

The AGP Strategy below has been prepared having regard to the recommendations from the Playing Pitch Strategy, the issues identified above (through NGBs) and responses made to the public consultation and sets out the Council’s preferred approach. The preferred approach set out below is not intended to prejudice the assessment of these or other pitch proposals that may be submitted as part of any planning application to the local planning authority.

AGP Strategy (Preferred Approach)		Note
Northern sports hub:	New 3G / FTP provision at the University of Gloucestershire/Oxstalls Sports Park with retention of a sand-based pitch.	At least 1 3G pitch to be World Rugby compliant, all 3G pitches to be FA compliant. University of Gloucestershire is the logical option to accommodate the summer based Rugby League need.
Southern sports hub:	New 3G / FTP provision to be provided at the proposed Blackbridge Sports Hub.	
Severn Vale School:	Retention of 1 x sand-based AGP, surface upgraded as a priority. Needs to tie in with the University’s plans as football and hockey users will both be displaced and require re-accommodating.	N/A
St Peters Roman Catholic High School:	Retention of 1 x sand-based AGP, surface upgraded as a priority.	N/A

Notes

- Displacement from Hartpury College to be looked at and will impact on the 3Gs proposed
- All new 3G provision subject to:
 - Usage showing good levels of use with development plans for growth and minimal/no displacement;
 - Strong business case showing sustainability with strong maintenance and sinking funds in place;
 - Planning permission being secured; and
 - Capital funding in place to deliver the build.

- The above preferred strategy does not preclude proposals being developed in other locations (subject to appropriate funding and other considerations), but sets out the broad strategic context for how the City Council and NGBs consider, at this time, AGPs could be delivered within the City. The AGP Strategy, along with the PPS will be monitored over time, and if one of the priority locations is found to be undeliverable, a revised Strategy will be prepared.

Appendix 1: Location of AGPs in Gloucester

