Fact Sheet 6

Playing pitches
Playing Pitches

Football, rugby, hockey and cricket pitches

Within our district we have a range of clubs playing football, rugby, hockey and cricket at different levels. The pitch requirements for different ages and levels are set out by the governing bodies for each of these sports and cover pitch type, quality, size and facilities. Progression through leagues will require a higher standard of provision for clubs. Our local clubs play on a range of grass and artificial grass surfaces. There is a need for additional capacity and range of pitches across these sports to ensure our local residents have the opportunity to play and to progress in their chosen sports.

Grass pitch provision

During the 2016/17 football season there were pitches of all Football Association (FA) recommended sizes in the district being used by the community. The majority of these are on sites with secure community use agreements with the facility, which oblige them to provide community use. For example a school site might have a community use agreement, or a playing pitch built on a new development may have a clause in the S106 agreement. There are a small number of grass football sites not in secure community use agreements, at schools and at RAF Croughton, where there is an identified need to seek to confirm long term security of community use.

There is an identified gap in grass pitch capacity for football teams to play and train within Towcester, where there is inadequate provision for the approximate 27 teams, covering all age ranges.

Artificial grass pitches (AGPs)

Within our district there are 13 AGPs of various types and sizes which are available to the community for a range of hours per week. The majority of these are deemed to be of a ‘standard’ quality with only Winchester House AGP being rated as ‘good’. There has been ongoing development of the quality of AGP pitch surfaces. These pitches provide an all-weather solution so extend capacity regardless of the weather or season. AGPs are generally floodlit, which extends usage to the evenings. They can be used for training to prevent over-use of grass match pitches.

AGPs require less routine grounds maintenance than grass, but have a life span of around 10-12 years, so need to be budgeted for accordingly. Operators generally charge clubs and groups a higher cost for use of AGPs to reflect the quality of facility. Of the AGPs within our district, four sites have pitches which are over 10 years old, though their quality is reasonably good. A further five sites have carpets which are between five and 10 years old. There are only three which are less than five years old. The age of the existing facilities is therefore a key issue and the investment in replacement carpets will be essential to enable the older facilities to be continued to be used.
AGPs are available at the following sites:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site name</th>
<th>AGP type</th>
<th>Pitch size</th>
<th>Age of surface</th>
<th>Floodlight</th>
<th>Changing available</th>
<th>Site control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campion School</td>
<td>Sand Dressed</td>
<td>60x100</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline Chisholm School</td>
<td>Sand Dressed</td>
<td>60x100</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deanshanger Sport and Social Club</td>
<td>Sand Dressed</td>
<td>40x30</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Sports Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Woodville School (Deanshanger)</td>
<td>Short Pile 3G</td>
<td>60x100</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Woodville School (Roade)</td>
<td>Sand Filled</td>
<td>60x100</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Woodville School (Roade)</td>
<td>Sand Filled</td>
<td>47x35</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grange Park Community Centre</td>
<td>Short Pile 3G</td>
<td>33x40</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Community Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdalen College</td>
<td>Sand Filled</td>
<td>60x100</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silverstone University Technical College (UTC)</td>
<td>Sand Filled</td>
<td>25x16</td>
<td>Less than 2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>UTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St James Park (Brackley Town FC)</td>
<td>Short Pile 3G</td>
<td>60x40</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Sports Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gateway School</td>
<td>Short Pile 3G</td>
<td>31x36</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towcester Centre for Leisure</td>
<td>Short Pile 3G</td>
<td>65x30</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchester House School</td>
<td>Sand Dressed</td>
<td>60x100</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Independent School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 AGP types


(2G) Sand Filled: Short grass and hard surface, sand-based with short synthetic grass. Best suited for hockey, but can accommodate football.

(3G) Short Pile: Long synthetic grass with shock-absorbent rubber crumb. Best for football. Resembles real grass and is a safer surface than 2G from an impact injury perspective due to the shock absorbent underlay.
There are currently no full size 3G football turf pitches on the FA register in the district, but there are large size short pile 3G pitches at Elizabeth Woodville School, Deanshanger, and small size short pile 3G pitches at The Gateway School, Brackley Town FC, Towcester Centre for Leisure, and Grange Park.

There are a number of small size sand dressed pitches at:

Deanshanger Sports and Social Club (not floodlit), Elizabeth Woodville School in Roade (not floodlit) and at the Silverstone UTC. Lack of floodlighting restricts evening use of the facilities. There are no AGPs suitable for rugby use.

None of the large pitches meet the current requirements in terms of dimensions for either football or hockey. Most sites are relatively well used, but all have some spare capacity during the peak period.²

### Stadia sites

The FA’s Ground Grading requirements specify football pitch type and site depend upon the level at which a club is playing. Stadia sites cover a wide range of facility levels, from relatively simple fenced pitch with toilets but no other spectator provision or floodlights, up to a major professional club stadium. As teams progress up through FA Step numbers the Ground Grading requirements become more demanding. Our district teams playing in the FA National League System and requiring stadia pitches are shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club</th>
<th>National League System Step</th>
<th>Ground</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brackley Town FC</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Brackley Town FC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brackley Town Saints</td>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Brackley Town FC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cogenhoe United</td>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Compton Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugbrooke United</td>
<td>Step 6</td>
<td>Bugbrooke St Michael FC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blisworth James King</td>
<td>Step 7</td>
<td>Blisworth Football and Supporters club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harpole</td>
<td>Step 7</td>
<td>Harpole Playing Fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heyford Athletic</td>
<td>Step 7</td>
<td>Heyford Playing Fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roade</td>
<td>Step 7</td>
<td>Roade Football Club</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²Planning the future of open space, sport and recreation in West Northamptonshire; Part 3, Playing Pitches, NORTOFT 2017
Identified enhancements and provision for football

- **Brackley Town Football Club** (BTFC) plays in the National League North. Their ground at Churchill Way, Brackley does not meet requirements for promotion to the National Conference League and is leased from the council, which is a barrier to external funding. The club is very active in the local community and has recently been named Football Foundation Community Club of the Year at the National Game Awards 2019. The South Northamptonshire Draft Local Plan Part 2, September 2017 confirms the council’s support for the relocation of the existing sports club from Westminster Road, Brackley to a new Multi-Sports Hub. Options need to be further explored to confirm the site, the sports and clubs involved, deliverability and the timescales.

- In the interim as the landlord of the Brackley Town Football Club we have had discussions around the age of the facilities to include items such as seating which is reaching the end of its lifespan. It is in need of upgraded stadium facilities and seating to enable the club to house the numbers and to ensure that the lifespan does not expire and cause a health and safety issue. This will also give the club the ability to run more prestigious events and addresses the aging of the current stadium seating. The new facilities will have the ability to be moved when a suitable new site is found and will enable the club to encourage more interest in the sport and the club itself enhancing the provision of football facilities in the town.

- **Roade Football Club**: there is a need to replace the pavilion with a larger building including social space, designed to meet Ground Grading requirement (Step 7).

- **Towcester Town FC** is in North Bucks and District League Premier Division. They do not currently require a stadia pitch, although there may be a future need. To meet the capacity need for pitch provision within Towcester the South Northamptonshire Draft Local Plan Part 2, September 2017 confirms the intention to develop a 6 hectare site for football, including full size 3G football turf AGP, grass pitches and ancillary facilities including car parking.

- **Brackley Leisure Centre**: development of full size 3G pitch with football turf if not provided at future Sports Hub site.

- **Towcester Centre for Leisure**: review AGP site options if/when other 3G pitches are developed in or close to Towcester.

- **Elizabeth Woodville School, Deanshanger**: resurface existing 3G pitch to meet FA register standards and support on going community use.

- **Harpole, Heyford and Middleton Cheney Playing Fields**: explore options of increasing cricket capacity whilst retaining football.

- **Charlton and Pattishall Playing Fields**: improve changing/clubhouse facilities.

- **Silverstone Village Playing Field**: improve pitch drainage and maintenance for football to increase capacity.

- **Towcester Recreation Ground**: provide changing pavilion.
There are four rugby union clubs in our district with a total of 50 teams, covering a variety of age groups. These are Brackley, Bugbrooke, Northampton Men’s Own (Ashton) and Towcestrians. All of the sites are in secure community use and are directly controlled by the rugby clubs. There are currently no rugby specification AGPs in the district, and none are planned.

The Towcestrians RFC has seen an increase in the number of youth players, minis and colts in recent years, but the number of men’s teams has stayed the same. The club has increased the number of women and girl players and aims to run more female teams in the future. The club also anticipates running an extra men’s team. During the summer of 2018 the club installed floodlights on two of their pitches and also carried out pitch quality improvement works, supported by the RFU and the council.

Identified enhancements and provision for rugby

There is an identified need to provide additional pitch space at the Towcestrians RFC through the expansion of the site to provide an additional rugby pitch, plus the relocation of the cricket pitch to allow high level cricket league matches to be played on the site. The rugby use of the cricket outfield should be limited, and primarily serve the needs of minis and juniors.

- **Brackley**: Floodlight pitch and improve drainage. Improve pitch maintenance to increase capacity. Improve the social area. Seek to extend the site to provide additional pitch space.
- **Bugbrooke**: Floodlight additional pitch. Improve pitch maintenance across all pitches to increase capacity. Extend changing rooms and clubhouse.
- **Northampton Mens Own**: Increase capacity of pitches by improvement works followed by increased levels of maintenance. Upgrade floodlights. Extend changing rooms.

Cricket

There are 27 cricket pitches in secure community use within the district. In addition to the secure sites, there are three school sites which are available for community use but not used by community clubs at Chenderit School, Caroline Chisholm School and Elizabeth Woodville (Roade).

There is a wide geographical spread of cricket facilities across the district, with sites located at sports and playing fields both in or close to the main towns and in the more rural areas.

The Brackley Cricket Club site is part of the proposed development area at Westminster Road, Brackley. The South Northamptonshire Draft Local Plan Part 2, September 2017 confirms the council’s support for the relocation of the existing sports club from Westminster Road to a new Sports Hub.

The England Cricket Board (ECB) have flagged a number of issues with the Greens Norton site.
its small size, the adjacent children’s play area and the limited ancillary facilities. The site is not considered a good long term option for senior league cricket in the Towcester area.

**Identified enhancements and provision**

- **Brackley Cricket Club**: invest to increasing capacity for cricket across the week and explore new site options as part of proposed Sports Hub
- **Bugbrooke Cricket Club**: improve or replace artificial strip or otherwise invest to increase site capacity
- **Evenley Green, Hinton Cricket Ground, Charlton Playing Field**: provide or improve clubhouse facilities
- **Harpole, Heyford and Middleton Cheney Playing Fields**: explore options of increasing cricket capacity whilst retaining football
- **Horton House Sports Club**: explore options of increasing cricket capacity
- **Kislingbury Sports Field**: improve quality of artificial turf strip and nets
- **Towcestrians Sports Club**: Extend site to provide as least one additional rugby pitch and relocation of cricket pitch. Pitch development and maintenance should follow specialist agronomist advice. Long term, explore options to further extend site to provide new separate cricket pitch. This may require an additional clubhouse and extended access road
- **Ensure delivery of the planned cricket pitch at Towcester South. Involve ECB in delivery proposals to ensure appropriate design and delivery**

**Hockey**

There are currently no hockey pitches in the district outside of schools. Towcester Hockey Club currently plays at Northampton although it has its clubhouse at the Towcestrians Sports Club. A feasibility study is required to demonstrate sustainability, with an intention to return hockey to the district.

**Identified enhancements and provision**

- **Ensure that resurfacing takes place when required to enable club hockey to be retained at existing club sites.**
- **Caroline Chisholm School**: replace carpet to support use by Wootton Wanderers Hockey Club
- **Seek formal community use agreements for those sites where there is no agreement in place**
- **Site required by 2026 for additional hockey club venue in South Northants following detailed options appraisal, feasibility assessment and business plan. The options which should be explored are:**
  - **Campion School, Bugbrooke**: explore options of opening hockey surface AGP to community use. May require re-carpeting and resolution of any access issues
  - **Elizabeth Woodville School, Roade**: may require re-carpeting and review of facility programming
  - **Magdalen College, Brackley**: explore options to introduce community club hockey
  - **Towcestrians Sports Club**: new full size sand dressed hockey pitch with floodlights

![Hockey](image.png)