South Oxfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy Assessment Conclusions

RUGBY UNION

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planning | policy | strategy | partnership

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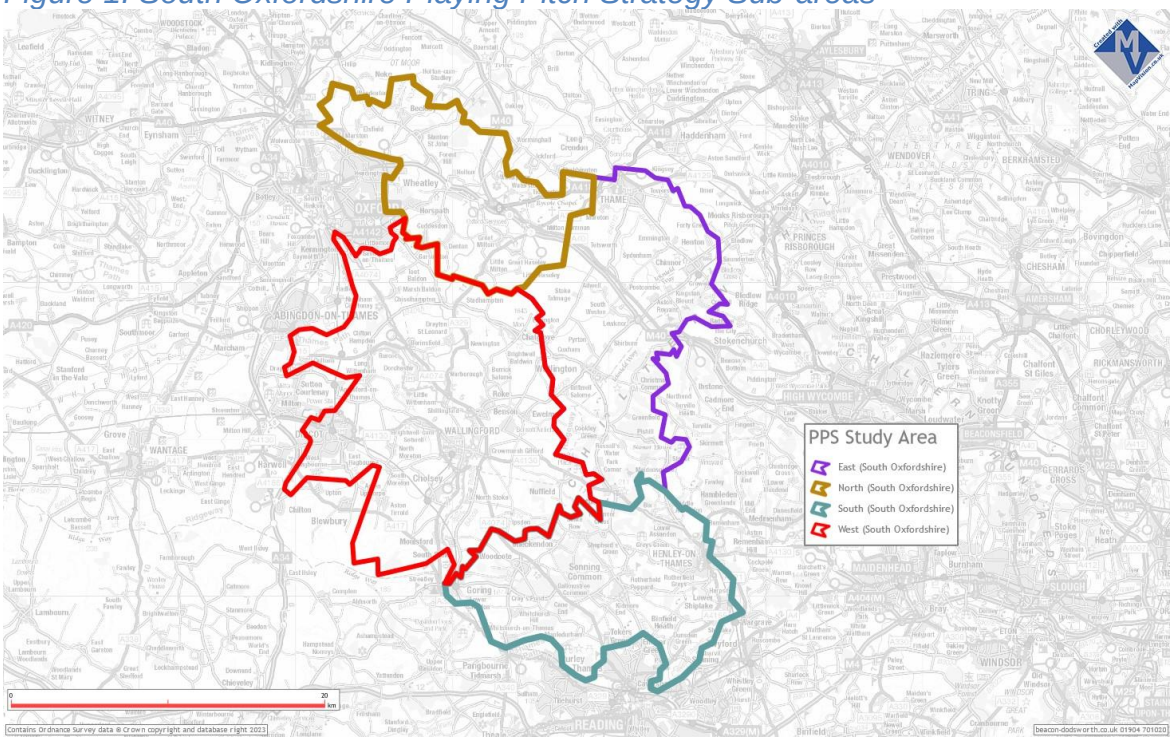
RUGBY UNION ASSESSMENT CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

1. This assessment uses data set out at length in the Assessment Tables, most of which are not repeated here. This is to make this report easily digestible and easy to understand. By necessity, this report summarises data as necessary and relates to as little detail as possible while still conveying the key points and issues required to arrive at conclusions and recommendations. Much of the place-specific data is set out in this report by sub-area. For clarity, the map below shows the areas covered by the sub-areas.

Figure 1: South Oxfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy Sub-areas



Assessment Summary

2. Rugby has a tradition of playing on grass pitches which tend to be subjected to significant wear and tear and therefore have additional pressure to maintain quality to at least a 'standard' condition. More recently, technology has moved sufficiently forward to enable training and matches to take place on artificial grass surfaces where adequately sprung (where a pitch meets the World Cup 22 standard[1]) and such surfaces can be shared with football. It is understood

[1] World Cup 22 relates to the standard required of artificial turf for rugby. Pitches need to be tested every 3 years to remain World Cup 22 compliant. See http://playerwelfare.worldrugby.org/content/getfile.php?h=363a53bd2243e43b6a56a54cad04b996&p=pdfs/World_Rugby_Regulation_22_EN.pdf for the full

that Sport England, the Football Association and Football Foundation and Rugby Football Union are currently exploring the use of hybrid grass / artificial pitches. Club rugby tends to be played on pitches dedicated to a club as a home ground and the supply of pitches at schools tends only to feature in terms of club use if a club's pitches are overplayed or waterlogged, therefore requiring additional capacity to train. Clubs also prefer to retain play (matches and training) at their home ground to retain any spend in the club's social facilities to help maintain viability of the club.

3. In South Oxfordshire in the 2022/23 season there were 6 Rugby Football Union (RFU) affiliated clubs, namely Chinnor RFC, Wheatley RFC, Reading Abbey RFC, Wallingford RFC, Oxford Harlequins RFC and Henley RFC. Between them there are 7 women's, 24 men's, 8 U14-U19 girls', 27 U14-U19 boys and 38 U7-U13 mixed teams.

4. Across the District the home grounds used by Chinnor RFC pitches, Wheatley RFC (Holton / Wheatley Playing Fields), Henley RFC pitches, Reading Abbey RFC (Rose Hill), Wallingford RFC (Wallingford Sports Park) and Oxford Harlequins RFC (Horspath) currently offer secure community use. Pitches used by Chinnor RFC at Thame Showground and those used by Henley RFC at the Rotherfield College campus are considered unsecure community use, representing a risk to certainty for the clubs using those grounds. Unsecure grounds will also mean that clubs wishing to access grant funding to improve facilities and / or pitches may not qualify for support. However, Henley RFC and Rotherfield College appear to have a good working relationship with the clubs which use their pitches, which provides a degree of security of use for the club and there is interest from the College in providing a rugby compliant 3G pitch at the Rotherfield site currently used by the rugby club for training (in addition to their home ground).

5. The Assessment Tables Report shows the location of pitches.

6. Most players play at clubs close to where they live. There is some cross-boundary movement into and out of Vale of the White Horse in relation to clubs in Didcot and Abingdon, while the clubs with home grounds close to Oxford and Reading will see some imported demand for a small number of players from those cities.

7. We have been asked, by the RFU, to record play (demand) only on club home ground pitches which have posts installed. Therefore, pitches and training grids without posts, used by some clubs out of necessity (as overflow pitches) to accommodate demand have not been considered in the figures below. Demand on those overflow pitches have been added to demand on pitches with goalposts.

8. Taking into account the pitches' quality (based on an assessment of drainage and maintenance regimes), carrying capacity in relation to their quality and how much play (both matches and training) is taking place:

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regulation. Further information about Rugby 365 3G pitches is available here - https://www.englandrugby.com/rugby365/about

i) In the East sub-area, 4 pitches at Chinnor RFC are being over-played by 16.75 match equivalents (around 5 pitches of capacity).
ii) In the North sub-area, 1 pitch at Wheatley RFC (Holton) is being over-played by 2.5 match equivalents (around 1 pitch of capacity).
iii) In the North sub-area,3 pitches at Oxford Harlequins RFC (Horspath) (also used by Oxford Brookes University teams) are being over-played by 16 match equivalents (around 5 pitches of capacity).
iv) In the South sub-area, 5 pitches at Henley RFC are being over-played by 10.25 match equivalents (around 3 pitches of capacity).
v) In the South sub-area, 6 pitches at Reading Abbey RFC (Rose Hill) are being over-played by 24.5 match equivalents (around 7-8 pitches of capacity).
vi) In the West sub-area, 4 of the 6 pitches at Wallingford RFC (Wallingford Sports Park) are being over-played by 8.25 match equivalents (around 2-3 pitches of capacity), while 2 of the 6 pitches have a little headroom capacity, amounting to 2 match equivalents, with the overall balance on the pitches therefore being over-play by 6.25 match equivalents.

9. It is clear from these figures that the existing supply (capacity) of rugby pitches available to club teams should be protected. There is demand at all grounds and overplay on most. Improving capacity at club pitches might be possible on some pitches (but not all) by making improvements to drainage and maintenance regimes (where this is possible), to relieve pressure on overplayed pitches by making other pitches more accessible (for example by introducing sports lighting where the additional play will not compromise quality) and securing additional pitch capacity, if possible, on existing pitches elsewhere or new additional pitches. 3G surfaces can also play a role in providing a significant amount of additional carrying capacity for clubs.

10. Henley RFC (South sub-area) benefits from use of its small (60m x 60m) 3G pitch, with training taking place for around 7 hours on weekday evenings and 2 hours at weekends. The pitch also enables some football to take place on weekday evenings (for around 7 hours) and other uses use a further 2 hours on weekday evenings. 18 hours of demand is therefore accommodated on weekday evenings, with little or no available capacity remaining.

11. The full-size WR22 compliant 3G at Horspath (operated by Oxford Harlequins RFC) is used for around 31 hours per week, mainly for rugby, with around 16 hours used on weekday evenings and 13 hours at the weekend by rugby and 2 hours on weekday evenings for football[2]. This leaves only 4 hours of headroom capacity on weekday evenings, likely to be during times when there is not demand for the pitch to be booked, and 3 hours at the weekend.

12. Ancillary facilities such as changing rooms and clubhouses seem to be "standard" quality. From data and information provided, changing facilities seem to be capable of accommodating people who do not identify as male or female gender or are transitioning, by adapting existing provision as

[2] Its use (during peak hours) breaks down as follows – Oxford Harlequins RFC, 5 hours weekday evenings and 9 hours at the weekend; Oxfordshire RFU, 2 hours weekday evenings and 2 hours at the weekend; Oxford Brookes University, 7 hours weekday evenings; and, Oxford University, 2 hours weekday evenings.

necessary. It is a recognised challenge, financially, to be able to retrofit gender neutral or unisex provision into older facilities (although this does not mean that it should not be addressed), but there will be opportunities in particular, moving forward, for new facilities to be able to accommodate fully the provision needed across all gender types. The challenge is similar for retro-fitting older changing rooms which were built for men to use and not women or young people.

13. The Sport England Playing Pitch Calculator (endorsed by the Rugby Football Union) has been used to project potential demand forward to 2041 based on population projections and estimates of change in participation rates agreed with the Rugby Football Union. Results have suggested an additional capacity required of 29.6 match equivalents to cater for rugby matches and training (where pitches are provided to a M2/D2 quality and supporting 3.25 match equivalents per pitch – i.e. good maintenance / pipe drained pitch), equivalent to 9 full size adult / senior pitches. This figure is for the whole of district and the figure can be broken down to estimate where this additional demand may arise based on clubs' ambition to grow, size of the clubs and the sub-areas likely to see the most population growth. For each sub-area, the additional demand to 2041 breaks down as follows:
    - East sub-area = 2.33 pitches
    - North sub-area = 4 pitches
    - South sub-area = 0.17 pitches
    - West sub-area = 2.9 pitches

    In reality, pitch numbers to be provided are rounded to the nearest whole pitch.

14. Across the area, some other types of demand (unmet or latent) have been identified by Chinnor, Oxford Harlequins RFC, Wheatley RFC, Didcot RFC and Wallingford RFC, although most clubs have not indicated the number of additional teams that they could field if this unmet and latent demand was satisfied. Clubs identified the following issues which would help them better accommodate current demand:
    - Chinnor RFC – additional grass pitches for matches and for training, sports lighting on existing pitches, access to artificial grass pitches for training and additional facilities such as changing rooms;
    - Oxford Harlequins RFC – , sports lighting on existing pitches, access to additional artificial pitch for training and additional changing rooms;
    - Didcot RFC – additional volunteers, access to additional artificial pitch and grass pitches for training;
    - Wallingford RFC – additional volunteers and coaches, additional grass pitches for matches and for training and additional changing rooms; and,
    - Wheatley RFC – additional grass pitches for matches and for training, sports lighting on existing pitch, and additional facilities such as changing rooms.

15. Indications of these types of demand help to guide where future additional capacity should be apportioned, how it could be best accommodated and also whether any additional capacity is required over and above accommodating existing overplay and future growth arising from calculator outputs.

16. In relation to imported and exported demand, information from clubs on where their players travel from to play at the club suggest that Didcot RFC, on the boundary with Vale of the White Horse, sees imported demand from that area, Chinnor RFC sees some imported demand from the Haddenham area to the north (of around 20% of their players), while there is expected imported demand from Oxford, particularly to Oxford Harlequins RFC and Wheatley RFC which are clubs which serve the city's population of rugby players. As expected, Reading Abbey RFC imports much of its demand from northern parts of Reading. Imported demand can have implications for additional future demand in addition to that calculated for the sub-area, although it is difficult to quantify unless an up-to-date PPS for the areas from which demand is imported is in place.

17. Clubs provided information on their aspirations to grow. The information provided enables an understanding to be gained of their view of their own direction of travel, what they need to achieve this growth and it helps to ground (or "bring alive") projected demand for growth derived from the calculator. The information provided is, however, "sense checked" to ensure that the information provided is reasonable.
    - Chinnor RFC (East sub-area) – 1 senior and 4 junior teams;
    - Oxford Harlequins RFC (North sub-area) – 3 senior teams and 8 junior teams;
    - Wheatley RFC (North sub-area) – 2 senior and 1 junior team;
    - Henley RFC (South sub-area) – 1 senior and 3 junior teams;
    - Reading Abbey RFC (South sub-area) – 1 senior and 9 junior teams; and,
    - Wallingford RFC (West sub-area) – 2 senior and 13 junior teams;

18. Provision of capacity during the strategy period needs to address overplay at the current time, latent, unmet, aspirational or displaced demand (if identified) and the additional demand projected to arise from population growth and participation rate change.

19. Summing all types of demand and overplay together for the district as a whole and assuming that all existing pitches can be improved to support a higher carrying capacity (including provision of sports lighting to support demand in the evenings for training) to a D2/M2 quality (which supports 3.25 match equivalents per week), equates to an equivalent of around 55.1 match equivalents or 17 additional grass pitches, preferably with sports lighting, needed by the end of the strategy period (to 2041, over the next 18 years).

The Role of WR22 Compliant 3G Pitches

20. WR22 compliant 3G pitches can play an important role in supporting demand and addressing over-use of grass pitches, particularly in relation to accommodating training, but also for matches where fully WR22 compliant (including dimensions of the pitch and rugby posts in place, as well as being the appropriate pile and sufficiently sprung). Assumptions can be made about the "carrying capacity" equivalent for 3G pitches which meet these requirements. We use the following basic calculations to equate a full-size sports-lit WR22 compliant pitch to a number of grass pitches.

	Assumptions	**Notes**
Weekend use	1 match equivalent = 120 minutes (2 hours)	Reflects additional "buffer" time likely to be needed before and after an 80 minute match (for warm-up / warm-down) as well as playing time and half-time.
	Peak time hours available on a 3G = 16 hours	
	Peak time on 3G = 8 match equivalents	
Weekday evening use	1 match equivalent = 1 x 2 hour training session (for 2 teams)	Based on PPS guidance and typical duration of training session for senior teams.
	Peak time available on a 3G = 22 hours	
	Peak time on 3G = 11 match equivalents	
Weekend and weekday use combined	Peak time on 3G total = 19 match equivalents	
	D2/M2 rated grass pitch = 3.25 match equivalents per week	
	Number of 3G pitches equivalent to the number of grass pitches therefore 19 / 3.25 = 5.8 grass pitches	
	Therefore it is a reasonable assumption that 1 x WR22 compliant 3G provides a similar level of capacity to around 6 grass pitches	This is a data driven figure. In reality, a 3G pitch is most likely to be a solution to sustain training on weekday evenings, with a preference of most clubs to play matches on grass pitches.

RFU Position on Contributions from Development Sites

21. The RFU strongly objects to the isolated development of pitches on new housing sites for rugby use. The RFU is clear and has been for several years that all planning gain which can benefit rugby should be channelled towards member clubs to achieve a number of key areas:
    - Enhancement of strategic rugby facilities and sites.
    - Enabling sustainable business models for the rugby clubs to develop.
    - Creating opportunities for age grade teams to flow through the ages ranges into senior rugby on single club sites, key to providing the necessary support to grow the game.
    - The RFU is open to looking at different types of surfaces, but are always keen to improve the grass / natural turf pitches at club sites. This can be through improved maintenance and, if required, drainage.
    - The RFU is often looking to solve training deficits by increasing sports lighting on sites, also key for the RFU, and the RFU always looks to seek 106 / CIL support for this.

22. The RFU would only consider on-development-site provision for rugby if this is to support a club move.

Strategic Housing Allocation Sites

23. In addition to using the playing pitch calculator to project potential future additional demand for each sub-area, the calculator has also been used to project potential demand which arises just from the strategic housing allocations where the PPS can still have an influence on provision (some allocations already have agreements in place for provision of pitches which the assessment and strategy include as “pipeline” commitments to additional supply).

24. When considering how best to plan for and accommodate demand arising from major developments, it is dangerous to assume that in every instance provision for grass pitches identified from the pitch calculator for all sports should be provided within the development itself. Experience suggests that “provide and they will come” does not work for most pitch sports.

25. Careful thought must be given the appropriateness, viability and practicalities of use, running and maintaining a pitch if in a location away from a club’s home ground. Economies of scale and critical mass of members and volunteers required are also important factors, with provision of single pitch sites rarely representing good value or a practical solution when split sites draw members away from an existing home ground (therefore, introducing additional travel for some existing members / players) and where ancillary facilities also need to be provided at significant cost. Careful consideration must be given to not create single pitch sites where no existing club is prepared to play or run and maintain the site as a satellite location. It should not be automatically assumed that a new club will simply emerge from demand and it is important to note that

demand arising from the new population will occur incrementally as the development is delivered and occupied and that without sports infrastructure and "people capacity" in place at an early stage, demand will simply gravitate towards an existing club. This can often be the result of new residents moving to new developments who already live within the same housing market area – it cannot be automatically assumed that all new residents are new to the area and these people will already have associations with existing sports clubs (and will be likely to retain them if travel time does not introduce an impediment such that it will stop them playing at their "home" club).

26. Operation of a satellite site for an existing club must be carefully thought through if this is considered to be a workable potential solution. For critical mass within age groups, it would be likely that a club would favour moving several age groups, for example, to a new satellite pitch. The implication can be that more existing players then have to travel further to the new satellite location than the alternative of players arising from demand at a new development travelling to an existing club home ground. Support of NGBs is critical to realise effective and efficient creation of new clubs and / or the introduction of satellite sites for existing clubs.

27. Pooling or securing contributions from multiple sites can often be a more workable and appropriate solution where funds can be used to strengthen and improve capacity at existing club sites or can be channelled into strategic sports hub sites within a major development site to replace existing club sites where improvements and expansion of capacity could prove challenging in the longer-term.

Oxford Brookes (Wheatley Campus) (c.500 dwellings, approx. 1,200 population) – North Sub-area

28. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the allocation will generate demand for around 1.12 full-size rugby pitches. Demand arising from this site will probably be best dealt with by seeking contributions to invest in pitch capacity at Wheatley RFC (Holton Playing Fields). Depending on timing, this could be provided to help improve pitch quality at the ground or to invest in a new additional pitch if there is capacity to do so on or adjacent to the current home ground. Alternatively, with regard to the development site, its size does not lend itself to multi-sport provision of pitches on-site and so any provision on the development site must be seen alongside other sports' demand for pitches generated from the calculator. Current approved proposals require that a cricket ground will be provided on-site in a s106 legal agreement.

Land North of Bayswater Brook (c.1,450 dwellings, approx. 3,480 population) – North Sub-area

29. We are advised, at the time of writing this assessment report, that there remains an opportunity to influence provision for pitch sports resulting from the demand likely to be generated at the site, and with particular reference to the off-site contributions which could be sought as a result of the scale of development. The playing pitch calculator suggests that, of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the North of Bayswater Brook development will generate demand for 3.25 x (full-size, senior) rugby union pitches. Given that likely provision will be made through off-site contributions,

this would mean a capital contribution of £555,833 for the pitches and a capital cost of £1,311,417 to contribute towards changing room provision. The calculator suggests an annual lifecycle (per annum) cost for the pitches of £118,948. These figures are based on use of the playing pitch calculator in October 2023 and figures should be reconsidered on a quarterly basis (or at appropriate times when financial data is updated by Sport England in the calculator) to ensure that they remain up-to-date. Use of the contributions to accommodate demand arising from the development should be discussed with Oxford City Council, Sport England and the RFU to help determine the most appropriate use of the monies to enhance provision on existing sites or contribute to additional new pitches, given the location of the site close to the city. However, options within the South Oxfordshire boundary include consideration of at least a proportion of the contributions for use at Oxford Harlequins RFC (Horspath) and / or Wheatley RFC (Holton) to improve existing provision, in line with the recommendations for the sub-area in this report.

Berinsfield (c.1,700 dwellings) (c.4,080 population) – West Sub-area

30. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the allocation will generate demand for around 0.33 full-size rugby pitches. Options to accommodate demand arising from the development include:
    i) recognising that demand could be best served by supporting existing clubs' needs (in this instance, at Abingdon RFC in Vale of the White Horse) with the likely scenario that demand from the two developments (Culham and Berinsfield) for rugby is likely to migrate to the nearest club or comprise mainly of players who already play at a close by club, given the developments' proximity and travel time to Abingdon. This option would mean channelling contributions into pitch improvements and additional capacity at Abingdon RFC's ground, as set out in the Vale of the White Horse rugby assessment report; or,
    ii) combining pitch demand with that from the Culham development (see below) and providing a single rugby pitch with associated changing facilities on this or the Culham development site. Comments made above must be considered if considering this option as a solution. Consideration of supply being made on a school site, if a new secondary school is proposed as part of the new development, could help to make a new grass pitch viable. However, comments above with regard to viability, liability and fitting demand with supply still apply.

Culham Science Centre (c.3,500 dwellings, approx. 8,400 population) – West Sub-area

31. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the allocation will generate demand for around 0.68 full-size rugby pitches. Options to accommodate demand arising from the development include:
    i) recognising that demand could be best served by supporting existing clubs' needs (in this instance, at Abingdon RFC in Vale of the White Horse) with the likely scenario that demand from the two developments (Culham and Berinsfield) for rugby is likely to migrate to the nearest club or comprise mainly of players who already play at a close by club, given the developments' proximity and travel time to Abingdon. This option would

mean channelling contributions into pitch improvements and additional capacity at Abingdon RFC's ground, as set out in the Vale of the White Horse rugby assessment report; or,

ii) combining pitch demand with that from the Berinsfield development (see above) and providing a single rugby pitch with associated changing facilities on this or the Berinsfield development site. Comments made above must be considered if considering this option as a solution. Consideration of supply being made on a school site, if a new secondary school is proposed as part of the new development, could help to make a new grass pitch viable. However, comments above with regard to viability, liability and fitting demand with supply still apply.

Grenoble Road (c.3,000 dwellings, approx. 7,200 population) – West Sub-area

32. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the allocation will generate demand for around 0.58 full-size rugby pitches. Options to accommodate demand arising from the development include:
    i) recognising that demand could be best served by supporting existing clubs' needs where those clubs are located in reasonably close proximity to the development site (in this instance, at Oxford Harlequins (Horspath) and Wheatley RFC (Holton)) with the likely scenario that demand from the development for rugby is likely to migrate to the nearest club or comprise mainly of players who already play at a close by club, given the developments' proximity and travel time. This option would mean channelling contributions into pitch improvements and additional capacity mainly at Oxford Harlequins RFC and perhaps a little to Wheatley RFC; or,
    ii) combining pitch demand with that from the Northfield development (see below) and providing a single rugby pitch with associated changing facilities on this or the Northfield development site. Comments made above must be considered if considering this option as a solution. Consideration of supply being made on a school site, if a new secondary school is proposed as part of the new development, could help to make a new grass pitch viable. However, comments above with regard to viability, liability and fitting demand with supply still apply.

Northfield (c.1,800 dwellings, approx. 4,320 population) – West Sub-area

33. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the allocation will generate demand for around 0.35 full-size rugby pitches. Options to accommodate demand arising from the development include:
    i) recognising that demand could be best served by supporting existing clubs' needs where those clubs are located in reasonably close proximity to the development site (in this instance, at Oxford Harlequins (Horspath) and Wheatley RFC (Holton)) with the likely scenario that demand from the development for rugby is likely to migrate to the nearest club or comprise mainly of players who already play at a close by club, given the developments' proximity and travel time. This option would mean channelling contributions into pitch improvements and additional capacity mainly at Oxford Harlequins RFC and perhaps a little to Wheatley RFC; or,
    ii) combining pitch demand with that from the Grenoble Road development (see above) and providing a single rugby pitch with associated changing

facilities on this or the Grenoble Road development site. Comments made above must be considered if considering this option as a solution. Consideration of supply being made on a school site, if a new secondary school is proposed as part of the new development, could help to make a new grass pitch viable. However, comments above with regard to viability, liability and fitting demand with supply still apply.

Chalgrove Airfield (c.3,000 dwellings, approx. 7,200 population) – West Sub-area

34. The calculator suggests that of the demand projected for the sub-area as a whole, the allocation will generate demand for around 0.59 full-size rugby pitches[3]. Options to accommodate demand arising from the development include:
    i) recognising that demand could be best served by supporting existing clubs' needs where those clubs are located in reasonably close proximity to the development site with the likely scenario that demand from the development for rugby is likely to migrate to the nearest club or comprise mainly of players who already play at a close by club, given the developments' proximity and travel time; or,
    ii) combining pitch demand with that from other strategic developments, channelling funds into new provision elsewhere. However, comments above with regard to viability, liability and fitting demand with supply still apply.

Summarising Provision

35. To summarise provision now and in the future, four scenarios are set out below.

Standard Scenario – main preferred use of grass pitches on club sites supplemented by 3G and other grass pitch locations where necessary

34. The summary picture for supply and demand at club grounds (and sub-areas), now and in the future is as follows.

[3] The adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 allocates Land at Chalgrove Airfield for 3,000 homes. As of January 2024, there is no live planning application for this site. The emerging Joint Local Plan proposes to de-allocate this site for residential development. However, for the purposes of this strategy we have assessed the need generated by this allocation as it currently forms part of the development plan, and may be needed if the council receives a planning application on this site prior to the adoption of the Joint Local Plan. If the Joint Local Plan is adopted on the basis of removing the allocation, and no planning permission is in place, then the requirements for Chalgrove Airfield will not be implemented. If the site does not come forward for development, ensure, through monitoring, that sufficient pitch capacity is provided elsewhere in the sub-area, within the context of the overall strategy of provision in the sub-area, to cater for demand arising from the estimated population.

Figure 2: Rugby Supply / Demand Snapshot

Rugby Supply / Demand Snapshot (unsecure and secure community use combined)							
Club	**Teams**	**Home (and sub-area)**	**Home ground supply**	**Club demand**	**Supply / demand balance**	**Additional capacity introduced if existing pitch quality improved (and sports lighting available)**	**Projected net additional future demand (based on split of sub-area projected demand)**
			(match equivalents)				
Chinnor RFC	Women 1.5 Men 5.5 Juniors 16	Chinnor RFC (East)	6	22.5	-16.75	7	17.5
Should the 10 pitches at the Thame Showground be available for club use as secure use pitches, the additional capacity required can be accommodated on these existing pitches. Continued unsecure use put the club's existing capacity and potential for growth at risk. An additional risk to security of capacity is continued use by the club of Pitch 4, not owned by the club. Therefore, if Thame Showground becomes unavailable and the club loses use of Pitch 4, 6.5 additional new pitches will be required by 2041. The club currently has to play 60% of its youth matches away as the club is limited by pitch and changing space. Additional changing room space will also be important to provide at the club. Should the projected demand for an additional 1.5 sports-lit 3G pitches in the sub-area come forward during the strategy period in the Chinnor / Watlington / Thame area to serve football demand (see football assessment), provision at Chinnor RFC in Thame would helpfully serve some of the increasing demand for rugby training in the area if provided to WR22 compliant standard or sufficiently sprung to support training.							
Oxford Harlequins RFC	Women 2 Men 4 Juniors 11	Horspath Sports Ground* (North)	4.5	20.25	-16	5.25	21.75
Oxford Harlequins RFC is projected to see significant growth and so is likely to require the majority of additional new pitch capacity in the sub-area (c.6 pitches). The club has access to its full-size 3G which is used for 31 of the 38 hours available, with only 2 hours used for football. There is a little available capacity, therefore, although not necessarily at the right time and day needed for additional play. An additional WR22 compliant 3G pitch could provide additional capacity to reduce the number of additional grass pitches required.							

Some of the projected additional demand in the sub-area arising at Culham Science Centre and Berinsfield strategic housing allocations (equating to 1 pitch) could manifest at Abingdon RFC in Vale of the White Horse rather than at Oxford Harlequins and so one of these pitches could be best provided through additional capacity at Abingdon RFC. Some of the West sub-area's projected demand from strategic housing allocations could appear at Oxford Harlequins RFC and it is appropriate to apportion up to one pitch of this demand at the club and up to one pitch at Oxford RFC in Vale of the White Horse. Should a significant level of imported demand arise from Oxford, this could lead to an increased need for grass pitch capacity. A total of 7 additional pitches is therefore a reasonable level of potential demand at the club, although a second 3G would reduce this number significantly although perhaps not provide the right amount of capacity for matches, with grass pitches likely to be preferred for matches and for a proportion of training. Additional changing room space will also be important to provide at the club with only 6 changing rooms available, with only being self-contained. Early discussion with the Steering Group suggested that there might be aspirations by Oxford Brookes University to redevelop the Horspath site, with sports provision relocated elsewhere. If this occurred, any replacement should be provided to the same or better quality, but opportunities could also be taken to provide a new hub which caters for all demand identified on the site arising to 2041. Discussions with the University during the latter stages of the assessment process suggested that they may instead consider retaining the site and to consolidate and enhance sports pitches provision on the site in the future, with sports pitch use at their Botley site potentially being lost. *The site also supports demand from Oxford Brookes RFC teams and Oxford University RFC teams. These figures have been included in assessing demand on the Horspath pitches. The ground is also used for other sports, softball and baseball outside of the winter season and gaelic football (Eire Og club) in the sport's late Spring / Summer season.							
Wheatley RFC	Women 0 Men 3 Juniors 0	Holton Playing Field (North)	2	4.5	-2.5	1.25	3.25
Wheatley RFC is projected to have a small amount of growth and so one additional pitch would seem sufficient to accommodate growth to 2041. Some additional demand from the West sub-area could also be accommodated on an extra pitch, as could some which could arise from developments at Grenoble Road and Northfields, although much of the demand from these two developments could migrate to Oxford Harlequins RFC, being a larger club than Wheatley RFC.							
Henley RFC	Women 1 Men 4 Juniors 12	Henley RFC (South)	3.5	13.5	-10.25	12.75	3.25

Henley RFC uses a small 3G pitch at its home ground in addition to its grass pitches, which currently has capacity to accommodate additional training slots (subject to whether these are on a preferred day for training). The club also currently utilizes grass pitches at Henley College when necessary (at Rotherfield) to supplement their home ground grass pitch use. If this use can be formalised as secure community use, and / or a proposed WR22 compliant full-size 3G pitch is developed by the College on their Rotherfield pitch site, or the club can get some use of a new 3G if needed and developed elsewhere in Henley to accommodate rugby training (e.g. Jubilee Park), it is unlikely that additional new grass pitches would be necessary for the club if their existing pitch quality can also be improved to increase capacity. Otherwise, a minimum of one additional grass pitch could be required.							
Reading Abbey RFC	Women 2 Men 5 Juniors 21	Rose Hill (South)	9	33.5	-24.5	10.5	8.75
Reading Abbey RFC has some ambition to grow the number of teams it has and is a large club. It would seem appropriate to consider an additional 2-3 pitches to serve the club on the basis of demand projections, assuming that the quality of the existing pitches can also be improved to increase capacity at the home ground. There could be additional demand arising from Reading and imported into the district. Without an up-to-date PPS for Reading it is difficult to project figures for potential imported demand with any real accuracy. Demand at Rose Hill should therefore be reviewed when Reading has an up-to-date PPS in place and until that time it would be sensible to plan for some more additional demand over and above that projected by the calculator for the sub-area. A suggested “reserve” additional 4th grass pitch should be considered in the longer-term as a result. The club could benefit from access to a WR22 compliant 3G or at least a 3G which has the appropriate shock pad and pile to support evening training. Opportunities in Sonning Common at Bishopswood (Rotherfield Utd) where the football club has an ambition for a 3G on its home ground, could be explored to reduce the overall demand for grass pitches at Rose Hill or close by to serve Reading Abbey RFC. Additional changing room space will also be important to provide at the club, which finds logistics of match day kick off times difficult with the limited availability of changing rooms.							
Wallingford RFC	Women 1.5 Men 2.5 Juniors 13	Folly Sports Park (West)	7	13.5	-6.25	12.5	0.75
Should the quality of pitches be improved, thus increasing capacity, this will provide sufficient capacity to absorb almost all of the sub-area’s projected growth. However, an additional grass pitch or some capacity on a WR22 compliant 3G would help to provide additional capacity for growth towards 2041 should it emerge on the ground. In reality, it is likely that much of the demand suggested by the calculator figures in this sub-area will emerge from strategic housing growth at Chalgrove, Berinsfield, Culham, on the edge of Oxford, and in Didcot. 1 pitch of additional demand of the West’s 2.9 pitches has been apportioned to Abingdon RFC in Vale (from Culham and Berinsfield allocations). Didcot RFC sits within Vale of the White Horse District							

and so it is sensible to apportion some of the 2.9 pitches additional demand to Didcot RFC. There is an aspiration for a full-size sports-lit 3G pitch at the Sports Park. Provision of such a pitch could benefit rugby capacity if the surface has a shock pad and has the appropriate pile to accommodate rugby training. Access to some time on a 3G would reduce the additional demand for grass pitch capacity on the site.		
Projected additional demand[4] across district to 2041 (without improvements to existing pitch quality or 3G pitches playing a role)	Match equivalents (training & matches)	30.6
	Pitches (full size, sports-lit)	9.4

[4] it is important to note that figures for future demand should not be read or relied upon in isolation outside of the context provided by the strategy recommendations.

35. The figures represent a “top end” figure for demand which would need to be carefully monitored to understand the realistic need for the resultant pitch capacity. As projections of demand and need are based on assumptions around increasing growth and participation, which may or may not come to fruition, additional provision should be responsive to demonstrable levels of demand prior to going ahead.

36. As the table above suggests, the figures for demand by the end of the strategy period do not necessarily mean that all projected additional physical pitches must be provided. Accommodating the projected capacity / demand needed should be catered for first from:
    - securing pitches with unsecure community use on education and other sites used by clubs for community use, also securing long-term tenure;
    - any existing headroom capacity, through improvements to the quality of existing pitches where necessary to increase carrying capacity (in terms of the number of match equivalents that can be played on the pitch);
    - provision of sports-lights to accompany improved maintenance to enable pitches to be used for additional training and relieve other sports-lit pitches of over-use;
    - use of other existing pitches not currently used by clubs;
    - reconfiguration of grounds to fit additional pitches with posts in the same area, where feasible;
    - bringing any “mothballed”, closed or lapsed pitch sites back into use where in the right location to satisfy demand; and,
    - matching clubs with over-play on pitches with new grass pitches already “in the pipeline” to be delivered.

37. Any new pitches which are needed should be provided close to club grounds if possible to maintain and enhance the financial viability and security of the clubs and minimise need for additional changing or clubhouse facilities. Strategically, if demand is so significant that these measures combined cannot accommodate demand, a 3G pitch serving more than one rugby club or a shared surface with football could be considered as a solution if viable and feasible. However, of all of these options, to help maintain and enhance club viability in the long-term the first step should be to maximise the capacity of the current pitches used by clubs with secure sites through quality improvements.

38. Levels of actual short and medium-term demand will need to be closely monitored to understand how real demand changes and emerges “on the ground” during the lifetime of the strategy. A “plan, deliver, monitor, manage” approach should therefore be taken to the provision of additional capacity.

Scenario A - No education sites in supply

39. Only one club utilises education sites at the current time. Henley RFC is using two pitches owned by Henley College (Rotherfield site). A priority will be for the club to secure community use on the site and certainty of tenure or long-term hire if possible. Demand on the site is not recorded in the supply / demand figures and so loss of their use is already factored into calculations. If

use of these pitches are lost to club use, replacement pitches would need to be found to accommodate existing and future play.

Scenario B - Supply lost in areas of high deprivation

40. There are no rugby club home grounds located in areas of high deprivation.

Scenario C – No additional artificial pitches

41. Additional full-size sports-lit WR22 compliant 3G pitches could play a role, as indicated above, in accommodating demand for Oxford Harlequins, Reading Abbey, Henley and Wallingford RFCs replacing reliance on a high number of additional grass pitches required to 2041. Should 3G pitches not be supported, the number of grass pitches set out above to accommodate demand for these clubs will likely need to be provided on sites close to existing club provision to ensure their long-term use and viability or on a new club ground which hosts the appropriate number of total pitches, after other options to accommodate additional demand have been exhausted.

42. There could also be a "knock-on" impact of no new additional artificial pitches, with a greater number of teams across rugby, football and hockey all competing for artificial pitch time on existing AGPs. With hockey unable to play on 3G surfaces, this puts pressure on sand-based surfaces, competing with football and this will squeeze the amount of time available to rugby in the future on the WR22 compliant 3Gs.

Decarbonisation, Sustainable Travel and Climate Change

43. When considering the decarbonisation, sustainable travel and climate change agendas, there are several ways that the sport can help to minimise impact and contribute positively towards mitigating and adapting to the changing climate.

44. For example, clubs in control of their ground and providers / owners of grounds and facilities, measures such as solar pv and heat pumps can help to secure a local supply of energy and contribute towards lowering energy costs, as can retrofitting insulation to buildings[5].

45. Considering cycling and walking catchments, the following areas are outside of a reasonable walking and cycling distance to club home grounds: the southern part of the East sub-area, boundary areas between the South and West sub-areas, a northern belt across the West sub-area and the south-eastern and north-western fringes of the North sub-area. The assessment of grounds used by clubs suggested that almost all club sites have secure cycle parking, although a limited number of cycle stands, and additional infrastructure could

[5] Advice is available for clubs, for example, https://susfootball.com/net-zero-football-club/

be offered to clubs to help encourage modal shift from cars. There were no cycle stands recorded at Rose Hill (Reading Abbey RFC).

46. However, this type of infrastructure provision can only be part of the answer. Sports facility, pitch and ground providers, nor NGBs or the local authority alone cannot be expected to provide all solutions to deliver this type of change "on the ground". Cultural shift is also required across sport with many players using cars to get to matches and training, and a continuing challenge is likely to be that there are not and cannot be a sufficient number of facilities, grounds and pitches provided in all locations to enable a 20 minute cycle or walk to them – it seems unlikely to be viable to provide that number for each sport. Cultural shift will be difficult to embed in many sports, also because many players will simply not have the time in their day to factor in a longer journey time to play and many will not be prepared to cycle or walk significant distances to play matches or train after playing their sport for anywhere between one and several hours (and particularly if the weather is poor and they play outside). This is not to say that this is a challenge not worth addressing, but the Playing Pitch Strategy cannot provide full answers and proposals to resolve such issues, particularly as they go beyond the remit of the strategy and will require cross-discipline, cross-department and cross-sector working within and with organisations and other stakeholders outside of sport and planning.

47. There are some environmental concerns about the use of artificial pitch surfaces for sport. This is a greater concern perhaps for football and hockey than for cricket, while rugby will use WR22 compliant 3G pitches for training and matches where demand suggests a need and play cannot be accommodated at club ground grass pitches. Concerns seem to focus around use of a synthetic pitch which is predominantly plastic, and for 3G pitches used by football and rugby, the use of rubber crumb to manage the movement of the ball and consequential loss of rubber particles off-site and into the environment and watercourses. Guidance already exists, however, about the use of infill materials on AGPs[6].

48. At the current time, competitive play of hockey on grass is not supported by England Hockey. Therefore, no other scenarios for hockey play with use of AGPs removed from future supply have been developed. If no sand or Gen2 surfaces are permitted in the future, either new additional or replacement surfaces, or an alternative surface other than grass does not come forward, at the current time, this will mean an end to club-based competitive hockey.

49. When considering benefits and perceived disbenefits of the use of AGPs, the following presents a summary.

50. Benefits / arguments for provision:
    - Health and wellbeing – greater access to an all-weather surface for a greater number of users.
    - "Outdoor classrooms" for schools.

[6] See https://sapca.org.uk/guide/codes-of-practice/

- Matches can still be played during very wet winters when grass pitches are flooded.
- Rubber crumb on 3G pitches is typically made from recycled material (e.g. vehicle tyres) and the surface (carpet) is recyclable at the end of its life..
- There are other infills for use on 3G pitches, for example cork olive pips.
- Economies of scale[7] – while there is a significant cost to building an AGP, for football, for example, a single full-size sports-lit 3G pitch can provide capacity equivalent to around 8-10 full size grass good quality pitches (5-6 of which would need to be sports-lit and fenced to protect quality and ensure that bookings can be honoured, with consequent costs and impact of powering more lighting and potential impact on dark skies). Good quality grass pitches would require proper management and maintenance to ensure that they remain good quality and able to accommodate the wear. If the pitches are only provided to "standard quality, additional grass pitches would be necessary, with perhaps 15 pitches equating to the provision available from a single full-size 3G pitch. For rugby, a WR22 compliant 3G sports-lit pitch provides capacity equivalent to around 6 grass pitches.
- Hockey can be played on a high-quality reliable, all-weather surface, minimising risk of injury. Competitive hockey cannot be played on a grass pitch, at the current time.
- Other sports, for example, rugby and lacrosse are played on AGPs.
- The potential impact of rubber crumb being lost and finding its way into watercourses, compared to erosion of micro-plastics and rubber from footwear, car and bike tyres, etc seems likely to be significantly small. There are measures which can be put in place through a scheme's design and location to minimise loss. However, it is also the responsibility of users to ensure that they make use of some measures to reduce loss from the site.
- A "ban" on all artificial "carpets" for sport would also have an impact on non-turf wickets for cricket and could also impact some indoor sports such as indoor bowls, if the principle is adopted equitably.
- Full-size AGPs can serve a wide catchment of population. While travel to AGPs is typically by private car by most users (unless they live within a comfortable walking or cycling distance) it is the responsibility of other, not just sports clubs or pitch providers to help ensure modal shift to lower carbon forms of travel. This will be a practical challenge to many sports players given time constraints, the need to take kit and equipment with them and desire to avoid poor weather (a disincentive to cycle). Improved travel solutions (both in terms of lower carbon and frequency of public transport) is necessary to change behaviour.

51. Disbenefits / arguments made against provision

[7] At the current time, a new full-size sports-lit AGP costs around £1m to develop. A single full-size 11v11 grass pitch, without sports-lighting, costs around £200k. Equivalent capacity on grass pitches is likely to therefore be around double the cost of a single AGP. Maintenance of this number of grass pitches and cost of lighting is also likely to be significantly more per annum than for an AGP if the grass pitches are to be maintained to a level which can cope with likely use. Costs estimates do not include the cost of land, likely to be higher for grass equivalent pitches due to the footprint / area required.

- Environmental impact at the end of the life of the carpet (surface).
- Environmental impact (in the case of 3G pitches) of infill.
- Building an AGP usually takes place on a grass pitch or greenfield site (although mitigation of loss of a playing field is usually required).
- AGPs tend to provide "strategic" provision due to the amount of use they can accommodate, their cost and catchment of users they need to be viable in the long-term. AGPs cannot usually be provided in a greater number of locations, meaning that travel to them, typically by private car, can be inevitable. Therefore, even if at much higher capital and maintenance cost, a greater number of high quality grass pitches in more locations will encourage users to cycle and walk to play sport and reduce the need to travel.

52. Work is ongoing (for example, by the AGP provider industry, Sport England and NGBs) to identify alternative materials to supplement rubber crumb use on 3G pitches, for example, using cork. Other studies are underway looking at the impact of rubber crumb and measures to mitigate its impact.

53. Clearly, for the environment, sport and health to benefit, and for solutions to be financially viable, a balance needs to be struck, as is the case throughout the planning system between provision of AGPs and resolution of adverse impact and satisfactory mitigation of these. For example, the Government has been looking at carbon assessments for developments to be brought in (which seem likely to be introduced anyway by many local authorities) and impact assessments for travel / transport and the environment already exist. Net gain for development has been introduced through the Environment Act and many Local Plans already introduced such requirements through policy. There is no reason why proposals for AGPs should not be required to demonstrate that they pass such tests. Authorities can already seek conditions on permissions including the design of schemes including multiple measures to prevent loss of rubber crumb from 3G pitches and end of surface life recycling for all AGPs. There is clearly a role for the planning system (and planning policies in particular in Local Plans) to ensure that such tests and requirements for mitigations are introduced to ensure that communities and people's physical and mental health can still benefit from AGPs without compromising or having a net additional adverse impact on the environment. Much will need also to be done, outside of sport and the planning system, particularly if there is a future without artificial pitches, to help make the shift required to achieve net zero and to prevent, mitigate and adapt to climate change, while also providing fully for sport and health.

Key Issues Snapshot

54. The assessment data and discussion with members of the steering group suggest the following key issues are most prominent:
    - Priorities and main concerns can be summarised as:
        - the significant amount of existing overplay on most club grounds which needs to be resolved to reduce the number of pitches needed moving forward, particularly on grounds which host large, growing clubs located close to housing growth areas (strategic allocations);

    - improving quality of existing pitches as a priority to support existing demand and reduce overplay;
    - ensuring that sports lighting can be provided to enable additional evening use in co-ordination with pitch quality improvements;
    - enhancing several changing rooms to cater for existing and future demand;
    - exploration of the role that WR22 compliant 3G pitches could play in several locations to support growth and negate a high number of additional grass pitches being necessary; and,
    - if 3G options are not supported, how and where best to find additional pitch capacity close to existing grounds to cater for demand which ensure club use away from the home ground.
- Pitches used by clubs which have unsecure community use (for example, those used for additional capacity by Henley RFC at Henley College (Rotherfield) should be secured to ensure long-term certainty of use.
- If projected growth comes to fruition, by 2041, and no measures are taken to improve existing pitches' quality, capacity which allows the equivalent to around 9-10 full-size pitches will be necessary to support existing and future club demand.

Strategy Recommendations

55. The above assessment conclusions suggest that the approach to the PPS strategy for **rugby** in the district should be as follows:

PROTECT

District-wide

R1) Protect the existing supply of pitches (and their capacity) identified in the assessment (for existing known, projected and potential additional currently unidentified future demand) unless replacement equivalent capacity can be provided elsewhere to an equal or better standard (i.e. "net improvements") reflecting the demand and type of use required "on the ground" by clubs (also see PROVIDE recommendations).

R2) Monitor the position in relation to clubs which have rolling annual, short and medium term leases or rental / hire arrangements for their home ground during the strategy period to ensure in advance of their expiry that they are renewed to provide certainty into a new period, preferably for the long-term.

R3) Regular monitoring of the balance between supply and demand should take place to ensure that appropriate use of any available capacity is being made and confirm that any spare "headroom" capacity to accommodate growth is not considered as "surplus" to rugby union use.

R4) Protect the quality of changing facilities through formal agreements to maintain the quality to a standard quality, at least, and improve to a "good" quality where possible.

R5) Ensure that all existing and new pitches that are World Rugby 22 compliant are re-tested every two years to sustain certification.

R6) Proposals for development which have an implication for the use of an existing pitch (such as change of land use) should take into account the recommendations of this strategy and policies of relevance in adopted Development Plans relevant to the site / pitch (i.e. Adopted Local Plans, other Development Plan Documents and Made Neighbourhood Plans).

Sub-Area Specific

North

R7) Protection of pitch supply is particularly important for club pitches. In this sub-area, this means protecting from loss all pitches (and the entirety of the club home ground and facilities) used by Oxford Harlequins RFC (Horspath) (and others including Oxford Brookes University, Oxford University and Oxfordshire RFU, and Eire Og Oxford gaelic football club and Oxford Softball League in the summer months) and Wheatley RFC (Holton Playing Fields).

R8) Protect the WR22 compliant 3G surface at Horspath from loss on the basis that it plays an important role in supporting demand from Oxford Harlequins RFC (and others including Oxford Brookes University, Oxford University and Oxfordshire RFU).

South

R9) Protection of pitch supply is particularly important for club pitches. In this sub-area, this means protecting from loss all pitches (and the entirety of the club home ground and facilities) used by Henley RFC and Reading Abbey RFC (Rose Hill).

R10) Protect the 3G at Henley RFC from loss given the use / capacity for training that it provides for the club.

West

R11) Protection of pitch supply is particularly important for club pitches. In this sub-area, this means protecting from loss all pitches (and the entirety of the club home ground and facilities) used by Wallingford RFC (Wallingford Sports Park).

East

R12) Protection of pitch supply is particularly important for club pitches. In this sub-area, this means protecting from loss all pitches (and the entirety of the club home ground and facilities) used by Chinnor RFC.

ENHANCE

District-wide

R13) Prioritise pitch quality improvements at secure community use grounds over unsecure community use grounds. Improving the carrying capacity of pitches should be aligned with provision of sports-lighting to ensure that additional capacity provided by pitch improvements can be practically utilised on

weekday evenings. The specific programme of works required to improve a pitch's quality must be informed by an independent GMA / Pitch Power report instructed by the NGB, local authority or club. 2023 GMA report recommendations are captured in the data tables report for rugby.

R14) Gain the secure use of clubs' pitches which do not currently have secure community use, to provide certainty of future supply and enable clubs and users to access necessary funding to invest in improvements.

R15) Enhance the quality of changing and other ancillary facilities where necessary to help ensure the quality of the experience for the sport is enhanced.

R16) Improve the current use of existing pitches, where physically and logistically possible, by considering flexibility of when matches take place.

R17) NGBs and the local authority should work with clubs, operators and providers, on sites where facilities and / or pitch areas are shared between sports, to ensure that management, maintenance and access is shared appropriately between sports, for example, through establishment of multi-sport site Trusts or other management bodies.

R18) Support proposals for improved energy efficiency and localised renewable and low carbon energy generation at facilities and grounds through measures such as LED directional lighting, solar pv, heat pumps and building insulation.

R19) Work with partners and key stakeholders to improve sustainable travel options to grounds, pitches and facilities.

R20) Support provision of secure cycle stands and ev vehicle charge points at club and other providers' grounds and facilities to enhance provision for low carbon forms of travel.

Sub-Area Specific

North

R21) Enhance capacity on pitches used by Wheatley RFC and Oxford Harlequins by improving quality through improved drainage (where viable / subject to funding and a business plan being in place to ensure maintenance costs are catered for in the long-term), by introducing sports-lights where necessary and feasible and by improving surface maintenance to ensure that the better quality is sustained in the long-term. Pitch improvements should be made to enhance capacity to at least 3.25 match equivalents (D2/M2 rating) and improvements should follow the recommendations made in the most up-to-date GMA pitch assessment report.

South

R22) Gain the secure community use of the pitches at Henley College (Rotherfield) used by Henley RFC for additional demand, to provide certainty of future supply.

R23) Enhance capacity on pitches at Henley RFC and Reading Abbey RFC by improving quality through improved drainage (where viable / subject to funding and a business plan being in place to ensure maintenance costs are catered for in the long-term), by introducing sports-lights where necessary and feasible and by improving surface maintenance to ensure that the better quality is sustained in the long-term. Pitch improvements should be made to

enhance capacity to at least 3.25 match equivalents (D2/M2 rating) and improvements should follow the recommendations made in the most up-to-date GMA pitch assessment report.

West

R24) Enhance capacity on pitches at Wallingford Sports Park used by Wallingford RFC by improving quality through improved drainage (where viable / subject to funding and a business plan being in place to ensure maintenance costs are catered for in the long-term), by introducing sports-lights where necessary and feasible and by improving surface maintenance to ensure that the better quality is sustained in the long-term. Pitch improvements should be made to enhance capacity to at least 3.25 match equivalents (D2/M2 rating) and improvements should follow the recommendations made in the most up-to-date GMA pitch assessment report.

East

R25) Gain the secure community use of the pitch 4 at Chinnor RFC used by the club for additional demand, to provide certainty of future supply and enable improvements in quality to be achieved, and also gain secure community use of the pitches used by the club at Thame Showground.

R26) Enhance capacity on pitches at Chinnor RFC by improving quality through improved drainage (where viable / subject to funding and a business plan being in place to ensure maintenance costs are catered for in the long-term), by introducing sports-lights where necessary and feasible and by improving surface maintenance to ensure that the better quality is sustained in the long-term. Pitch improvements should be made to enhance capacity to at least 3.25 match equivalents (D2/M2 rating) and improvements should follow the recommendations made in the most up-to-date GMA pitch assessment report.

PROVIDE

District-wide

R27) Where the loss of an existing pitch is unavoidable, provide replacement pitches or capacity to good quality standard in a location appropriate to demand to mitigate loss.

R28) Ensure that proposals for new pitches, both grass and 3G, and ancillary facilities, are provided outside of flood risk zones, or provision can be satisfactorily tested through the sequential and exceptions tests to mitigate satisfactorily against adverse impact and risk.

R29) Ensure that proposals for new and resurfaced 3G pitches:

a) provide satisfactory protection and mitigation to minimise rubber crumb and other infill loss (retrofitting containment if necessary);
b) are constructed to meet FA and RFU recommended quality performance standards to meet performance testing criteria; and,
c) provide energy efficient directional LED sports-lighting;

d) satisfy tests applied by the local authority in relation to carbon emissions, whole lifecycle of materials and requirements for net gains in biodiversity.

R30) Ensure that the provision of any new pitches and facilities meet the most up-to-date quality design standards and dimensions supported by the Rugby Football Union and Sport England.

R31) Ensure that any new facilities and other associated pitch infrastructure are provided to meet the most up-to-date Building Regulations, including, but not restricted to, those relating to accessibility.

R32) Ensure that any new pitches and facilities have a sustainable long-term business and financial management plan in place to ensure long-term viability. which includes usage plans. This includes, for 3G pitches in particular, the need for a sinking fund to retain funds during use for refurbishment or replacement of the surface and for recycling of the carpet and infill, a maintenance programme agreed between the provider, local authority and the RFU, and the provider must report to the local authority, Sport England and the RFU on an annual basis on the state of the sinking fund and statement of availability and use during the agreed peak period hours. Sinking funds established should be monitored to ensure that collection is taking place. The costs of hiring 3G pitch time and space will need to be competitive to help ensure future viability but it is important that, to help enable transition from use of grass for matches to maximise use of capacity on 3Gs at weekends, match play charges reflect those paid for grass pitch use.

R33) Ensure that all new pitches and facilities have a secure community use agreement in place for the long-term (preferably in perpetuity), including secure tenure, and that the appropriate body is identified to monitor and enforce such agreements.

R34) Seek to provide additional capacity, where needed, at (or, if this is not possible, within close proximity to) existing club home grounds as a preference over sites far from home grounds, where physical, ownership and planning constraints do not prevent such change. This will help to ensure the long-term financial stability of clubs given the social tradition and culture of the sport. Developer contributions sought for pitch provision / improvements for rugby should (for example, from the Community Infrastructure Levy or section 106 planning obligations) where feasible within planning regulations be considered first as contributions towards existing rugby club sites given the nature of how and where rugby is played (as a club on-site based sport). This could help to avoid contributions being sought or spent inappropriately on sites which may be remote from existing club home grounds and infrastructure and help to ensure any new provision or additional capacity provided through development is used (and in the most effective way). Additional capacity could be provided through grass, hybrid or 3G pitches.

R35) For development detailed in the adopted Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Infrastructure list, CIL monies could be secured towards the upgrade and management of existing strategic outdoor sports and recreation provision and creation of new provision and associated facilities (this includes playing pitches as identified in the PPS). However, it is recommended that local authority officers consider the benefits of bringing forward new and improved facilities related to development through s106 planning obligations as the most appropriate mechanism to understand and

apply requirements generated for sports pitches and ancillary facilities by a given population.

R36) Support provision of or contributions to fund new full-size sports-lit 3G pitches where certainty of delivery of the intended new 3G is or can be put in place (for example, planning permission secured) and mitigation of loss of the existing grass pitch on which the 3G would be built is considered satisfactory.

R37) Enable the supply of additional pitch capacity to accommodate existing overplay and future demand.

R38) The total amount of additional supply should come from a variety of sources, i.e. the projected demand is unlikely to need to be delivered solely through additional, new, grass pitches. Increased capacity to this amount will come from a combination of:

a. Increase reliability of pitch use and improving the quality and / or maintenance regimes of existing pitches to improve quality to a D2/M2 rating to accommodate 3.25 match equivalents per week (where viable / subject to funding and a business plan being in place to ensure maintenance costs are catered for in the long-term) (see **Enhance**);
b. providing sports lighting to increase evening training capacity (see **Enhance**);
c. securing community use and security of tenure on current non-club unsecure sites if possible and feasible for club use, for example on education or other provider sites;
d. new additional pitches at existing club grounds where feasible, for example, through reconfiguration of existing pitch layouts to accommodate additional pitches, or provision adjacent or close to existing club sites; and / or,
e. WR22 compliant 3G pitch(es) to serve as strategic provision if other provision to accommodate overplay and additional demand cannot be catered for through the above measures. (If a shared rugby and football 3G is seen as a solution for both sports, a programme of use and certainty of availability for each sport should be agreed.)

R39) New additional pitches required should be provided as close to existing club grounds or provided on new sites which accommodate all club needs. Where this cannot be achieved and provision of s106 or CIL monies are not provided to enhance capacity at existing clubs sites, satellite grounds could be explored, but practical use will be dependent upon a club's ability to adequately run (and maintain) a satellite ground. Volunteer capacity must feature as one of the tests to assess viability and feasibility, amongst others, and other risks to the club's long-term sustainability and viability must be mitigated. An alternative option, subject to financial viability and critical masses required to ensure viability both at start-up and in the long-term could be the establishment of a new club at a new ground. All off-club site provision must take into account the RFU position on provision of pitch capacity and facilities away from existing club sites.

R40) In cases where mitigation is required as the result of a loss of a pitch to development, and that mitigation is in the form of off-site contributions, to ensure certainty that the contributions can be used to deliver the intended provision in part or in full (and in turn help to address any "knock-on" mitigation required on the site to which the contribution applies), the Local

Planning Authority should consider introducing a Grampian condition[8] on permission to ensure that mitigation is delivered as intended (and therefore certainty of delivery is guaranteed).

R41) Provision of new additional pitches will need to respond to demonstrable demand "on the ground". This is particularly important in the latter part of the strategy period to ensure that projected demand has actually come forward. A "plan, deliver, monitor, manage" approach should therefore be taken to the provision of additional capacity.

R42) The provision of additional pitches and / or facilities should be closely co-ordinated between the club, RFU, Sport England, the local authority, and the land owner (where not one of the aforementioned bodies).

R43) Ensure that usage plans are developed for new 3Gs and include agreement on the balance of use between rugby and other sports where relevant.

Sub-Area Specific

North

R44) Within this sub-area, the following measures should be taken to address the current and projected demand:

a. Enable the supply of additional pitch capacity to accommodate existing overplay and future demand to a total equivalent capacity of 31.5 match equivalents across this sub-area with demand likely to arise at Oxford Harlequins RFC and at Wheatley RFC.
b. Providing for additional supply should come, broadly sequentially, following the process set out in the district-wide recommendation above in PROVIDE.
c. Should quality improvements be achievable to improve the quality and capacity of existing pitches on club grounds to accommodate 3.25 match equivalents per pitch, additional capacity should be provided to the following scale at the following clubs:
    i. Oxford Harlequins RFC – provision to support a net additional demand of around 6-7 grass pitches with sports lighting, unless sufficient and appropriate capacity which meets the clubs needs for training and / or matches can be guaranteed for the club through provision of a WR22 compliant sports-lit 3G pitch. Given the club's location, additional adjacent land to the north of the site could be considered as an area into which the current site could extend to provide additional grass and / or 3G pitch capacity.
    ii. Wheatley RFC – provision to support a net additional demand of around 1 additional grass pitch.

[8] See https://www.gov.uk/guidance/use-of-planning-conditions#Application-of-the-six-tests for further details on use of Grampian Conditions. Section - "When can conditions be used relating to land not in control of the applicant?" Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 21a-009-20140306. The NPPG states that Grampian Conditions are conditions which are "prohibiting development authorised by the planning permission or other aspects linked to the planning permission (eg occupation of premises) until a specified action has been taken (such as the provision of supporting infrastructure)".

Should pitch quality improvements not be deliverable on the existing pitches at these club sites, the additional carry capacity which would have been provided by the quality improvements should instead be provided on additional pitches over and above the net additional demand set out above.

d. Consider how best to respond to the demand generated by the strategic allocation development at Oxford Brookes (Wheatley) following options set out in this assessment report.

R45) Provide additional changing facility capacity at Oxford Harlequins RFC and Wheatley RFC home grounds.

South

R46) Within this sub-area, the following measures should be taken to address the current and projected demand:

a. Enable the supply of additional pitch capacity to accommodate existing overplay and future demand to a total equivalent capacity of 35.25 match equivalents across this sub-area with demand likely to arise at Henley RFC and Reading Abbey RFC.
b. Providing for additional supply should come, broadly sequentially, following the process set out in the district-wide recommendation above in PROVIDE.
c. Should quality improvements be achievable to improve the quality and capacity of existing pitches on club grounds to accommodate 3.25 match equivalents per pitch, additional capacity should be provided to the following scale at the following clubs:
    i. Henley RFC – provision to support a net additional demand of 1 grass pitch with sports lighting, unless sufficient capacity can be guaranteed for the club at the Henley College (Rotherfield site on grass or a potential 3G pitch, through security of community use and hire / tenure (see ENHANCE).
    ii. Reading Abbey RFC – provision to support a net additional demand of around 2-4 grass pitches, unless additional capacity can be accessed through development of any 3G pitches which can cater for rugby training, for example, at Rotherfield Utd (Bishopswood).

R47) Support provision of enough changing facilities to support growth in the women's and girls' game at Reading Abbey RFC.

West

R48) Within this sub-area, the following measures should be taken to address the current and projected demand:

a. Enable the supply of additional pitch capacity to accommodate existing overplay and future demand to a total equivalent capacity of 13.25 match equivalents across this sub-area with demand likely to arise at Wallingford RFC.
b. Providing for additional supply should come, broadly sequentially, following the process set out in the district-wide recommendation above in PROVIDE.
c. Should quality improvements be achievable to improve the quality and capacity of existing pitches on club grounds to accommodate 3.25

match equivalents per pitch, additional capacity should be provided to the following scale at the following clubs:

i. Wallingford RFC – provision to support a net additional demand of 1 additional grass pitch with sports lighting, unless sufficient additional capacity can be achieved through access to a 3G which can cater for rugby training on the Wallingford Sports Park site, or elsewhere in the town if not feasible due to land constraints and other sports' use on the site.

d. Consider how best to respond to the demand generated by the strategic allocation developments at Berinsfield and Culham, in relation to anticipated growth in demand at Abingdon RFC, and at the developments at Chalgrove Airfield (if it is delivered), Grenoble Road and Northfield, for all, following options set out in this assessment report.

R49) The local authority, NGBs, Sport England and Wallingford Sports Trust should work together on a preferred masterplan for the Sports Park site which either:

a. Best accommodates all of the growing clubs' needs on the site and resolves the current parking issues for the site; or,
b. Finds an alternative new strategic sports hub site which can accommodate growth for all clubs to 2041; or,
c. Finds an additional location for a sports hub in the town, consolidating two sports on the existing site and providing a new home location for one or more sports on an additional site. Consideration would also need to be given with regard to where and how best to accommodate other sports on the site such as tennis and archery (also see Facilities Assessment).

R50) Provide additional changing facility capacity at Wallingford Sports Park for Wallingford RFC if necessary.

East

R51) Within this sub-area, the following measures should be taken to address the current and projected demand:

a. Enable the supply of additional pitch capacity to accommodate existing overplay and future demand to a total equivalent capacity of 24.35 match equivalents across this sub-area with demand likely to arise at Chinnor RFC.
b. Providing for additional supply should come, broadly sequentially, following the process set out in the district-wide recommendation above in PROVIDE.
c. Should quality improvements be achievable to improve the quality and capacity of existing pitches on club grounds to accommodate 3.25 match equivalents per pitch, additional capacity should be provided to the following scale at the following club:

i. Chinnor RFC – provision to support a net additional demand of around 5-7 grass pitches with sports lighting, unless sufficient capacity can be guaranteed for the club by securing community use and tenure / long-term hire of the pitches owned by Thame Showground. Should a 3G pitch be provided during the strategy period to support the recommendations in the football assessment (in the Thame / Chinnor / Watlington area), if

provided in the Chinnor area, it could useful provide some capacity to support training for Chinnor RFC.

R52) Provide additional changing facility capacity at Chinnor RFC.

A Note About Delivery

It is the responsibility of all signatories to the PPS and to users and providers, to act upon and deliver actions identified in the strategy. Responsibility for provision is not solely the responsibility of any one party.