

Vale of the White Horse Playing Pitch Strategy Assessment Conclusions

Other (Lesser Played) Sports

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Other Pitch Sports

In addition to undertaking a fully compliant PPS guidance assessment for the main pitch sports, we were asked by the District Council to undertake an assessment of some other pitch sports, typically lesser played. These are: lacrosse, rounders, softball / baseball, rugby league and American Football.

An understanding of supply and demand was established using the same process as that used for the “main” pitch sports; liaison with sports governing bodies (NGBs), surveys or questions sent to clubs via NGBs where appropriate, and through identification of quality, supply and demand when gathering data for the main pitch sports (on the basis that most, if not all, lesser played pitch sports utilise the same pitches, either grass, artificial grass pitches (AGPs) or both.

Liaison with NGBs has suggested that there are no specific needs or demand issues for the lesser played sports in the District.

American Football

Consultation, Supply and Demand

American Football is played football in two sub-types, Flag (non-contact) and Contact (the fully kitted pads and helmet). These are split into age groups and a playing stream just for the women’s game. All other types are mixed sex. The season typically runs from April until the end of summer.

British American Football (BAF) were contacted to identify clubs in the area and key issues that they were aware of. In Vale of the White Horse, they identified one club, Oxford Saints, which play at Tilsley Park in Abingdon. The club had around 50 members in 2022. The club was sent a survey via the NGB, but did not respond. However, from the club’s website¹, they start training in January each year with matches starting in April. This suggests that most demand for pitch use will occur outside of the football and rugby seasons. Training usually takes place on grass pitches from 1-4pm on Sundays for seniors, 12-2pm on Saturdays for U19s, 11am-1pm on Saturdays for U16s and 10-11am on Saturdays for U14s. Home matches take place on grass pitches at Tilsley Park.

The only other demand in the District is hosted at Oxford Brookes’ Harcourt Hill campus (Brookes Sport, Botley) where the University’s team plays in the BUCS (Universities) league.

Key issues

- Opportunities for growth, in particular related to the club based in Abingdon and which could arise in the Oxford area.
- Most growth would seem likely to be accommodated at the existing club in Abingdon with players travelling to play there.
- University demand is likely to continue to be accommodated on University owned pitches.

¹ See <https://oxfordsaints.com/>

Recommendations

Protect:

- Capacity required for American Football club demand at Tilsley Park should continue to be made available to ensure certainty for the club.
- Supply / capacity for University teams should be protected.
- Any unavoidable loss or replacement of capacity should be mitigated through replacement in alignment with with Sport England's Playing Fields Policy.

Enhance:

- Enhance on-site facilities and pitch quality at Tilsley Park to support American Football on the site, if necessary during the strategy period.

Provide:

- Provide additional pitch time to the club using Tilsley Park as its home ground, should the club grow and require additional time to accommodate demand. Such provision should be made taking into account the time required on the pitch(es) used by the club by other sports. No other sports teams using the pitches as their home ground should be displaced from Tilsley Park without finding alternative provision first.

Lacrosse

Consultation, Supply and Demand

Lacrosse is played over the winter months. England Lacrosse (EL) has stated that there is one club in the District, Oxford Brookes University, which plays in Vale of the White Horse at the Oxford Brookes Botley campus at Harcourt Hill (on grass pitches). The nearest other clubs play within Oxford City; Oxford University and Oxford City Lacrosse Club which plays at The Oxford Academy. The latter formerly played at Horspath in South Oxfordshire (moving to access sports-lit pitches for training during winter). The next nearest club plays to the south of the District in Newbury.

EL circulated surveys to clubs. Responses were received from both Brookes Lacrosse Club and Oxford City Lacrosse Club. Brookes, which plays in the District has 2 women's and one men's team, all of which play in BUCS (Universities') leagues. The club has said that it could grow if it had more volunteers, coaching staff and access to a training facility. Specifically, the club identified need for access to an astroturf (for example, at their current training ground at Cheney School, in Oxford City adjacent to the Headington campus) with lacrosse line markings so that they can train properly and play matches on both their current grass pitches at Harcourt Hill and also get more appropriate use of their current training pitch. They also specified a need for sports-lighting at their grass pitch at Harcourt Hill to enable them to play more matches over winter during the day (they play matches on Wednesdays). In turn this would also,

they suggest, enable them to field more teams, perhaps one more women's and one more men's team. The response from Oxford City Lacrosse Club did not suggest that they have any needs relating to Vale of the White Horse, with no indication of a desire to move away from their current ground in Oxford.

Key issues

- A need to increase capacity at Brookes' current home ground, for example, through sports-lighting at Harcourt Hill (Brookes Sport, Botley), to enable growth of the club.
- For any future facilities EL would look for access to floodlit pitches with the preferred surface being 3G. Where not available, lacrosse is normally played on grass, and hard hockey surfaces, although useable, are not ideal.

Recommendations

Protect:

- Protect the existing pitch(es) used by Brookes at Harcourt Hill, Brookes Sport, Botley from loss. Where loss is unavoidable, mitigate loss through replacement in alignment with Sport England's Playing Fields Policy.

Enhance:

- Support provision of additional sports-lighting at Brookes' home ground to enable additional matches to be played on Wednesdays during the winter season, where such provision will not reduce the quality of the grass pitch(es) used.

Rounders

We have had no response from Rounders England. However, in most cases rounders can usually be accommodated as a social game during summer months on school or local authority owned sites.

Softball and Baseball

We contacted Baseball and Softball UK, which responded to confirm that there are no clubs or leagues in Vale of the White Horse, with the nearest league operating out of South Oxfordshire from Horspath Athletics Ground.

Rugby League

We contacted the Rugby Football League, which confirmed that there are no clubs in the District, with the nearest three clubs being in Swindon, Wokingham and Reading. We contacted these clubs asking if there are any issues which might relate to the District but had no response.

Gaelic Football

We contacted the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) of Britain which confirmed that there are no gaelic football clubs in Vale of White Horse. The closest club plays in South Oxfordshire district at Horspath playing fields.