

Sport at Norton Fields

South Hams and West Devon Playing Pitch Strategy Report, and Open Space Sport and Recreation Funding Plan all identify Norton Fields as a potential 'Sports Hub'. The provision of shelter is also recognised as essential, both for users/players but also for spectators, parents attending coaching or competitive activities. (Norton can be pretty bleak in adverse weather conditions!).

The lack of shelter and no 'club house facilities' undermines clubs' growth as coaches and players move on to adjacent towns where these facilities exist. Dartmouth AFC thrives as it has precisely these facilities.

There are currently several sports playing and aspiring to develop facilities at Norton Fields. This paper is an attempt to set out the challenges facing clubs in utilising and intensifying use of Norton Fields for the committee to consider and develop a formal policy.

Leisure Centre and Swimming Pool

Current facility: SHDC own the land and carpark on which the site stands, swimming pool trust own the land occupied by pool. They are both let on a 25 year management contract (from 2016) to Fusion Lifestyle. The building provides a comprehensive range of indoor sports and gym facilities at prices agreed between Fusion and SHDC. There are two changing rooms accessible to outdoor users of Norton Fields, which are only accessible during Leisure Centre opening times.

Current status: due to Covid-19 the Leisure Centre is closed at least until November 2020.

Dartmouth Rugby Union FC

Current facility: Full size grass pitch with steel posts marked out by the club and grass cut by SHDC. A container is located on hedge line adjacent to park and ride overspill (due to become Dartmouth Medical Centre) which contains mobile training lights, corner posts, goal post pads, scrum machine etc.

Training takes place between dead ball line and hedge area.

Current status: DRUFC has been negotiating with SHDC to obtain lease of whole of Norton Fields. In order to obtain any funding for new or improved facilities from England RFU an unexpired lease of 25 years is an obligatory criterion for grant aid. SHDC have offered a one year rolling licence. DRUFC are currently considering their options.

Club Aspirations: DRUFC wish to develop a club room facility with access direct to fields, preferably next to current external changing rooms located in the leisure centre. The site area is currently occupied by a skateboard park which would then need to be relocated. Funding can only be raised if secure tenure of site is achieved.

Dartmouth Hockey Club hold joint social events with the Rugby Club and would welcome a 'Club House base' in Dartmouth.

Skate Boarding

Current facility: located at rear of leisure centre, well used but is described by users as "not very challenging".

The facility is unmonitored and open to casual use, but has attracted several incidents of anti-social behaviour.

Dartmouth Athletics Club

Current Status: Founded over 40 years ago, the club has a membership of 30 adults and 40 children. There is a waiting list of children who cannot be accommodated due to lack of coaches to ensure safeguarding issues. Coaches cannot be recruited due to a combination of shortage of qualified coaches, funding and permanent facilities. The club also has a container on site for equipment storage. The Club employs a contractor from Cullompton to mark out their oval, and additional grass cutting at their own expense. The Club has also installed a run-up and jump pit alongside the park and ride hedge.

Club Aspirations: To continue to develop local talent. The use of a 'Club House' and 'clean changing facilities' would facilitate enlargement of membership and activities.

Dartmouth Bowls Club

Current Facility: Located in Victoria Road, with an all-weather rink, changing facilities and club room and toilets, the club has a thriving membership and successful league teams.

They have a yearly rolling lease from SHDC.

Current Status: SHDC and the Bowls Club have explored possibilities of relocating the club from current site to Norton Fields. The proposed site would require a rink to be built, with changing facilities, club house, storage facilities all fenced around for security. Funding for relocation has not been identified but is assumed to be by SHDC's potential proceeds from sale or development of Victoria Road site. The club has requested additional space for 16 No. dedicated car parking spaces. All this development would impact on athletics oval and jump pits. The rugby club were consulted on this proposal and agreed that shared changing facilities would not be practical.

Club Aspirations: Unless the clubs' facilities were 'improved and enhanced' above their current sites facilities they would be unwilling to relocate. The club requires a long lease in order to raise central funds (as Rugby Club) and their continued 'one year rolling tenure' of Victoria Road is also an ongoing constraint for them.

Cricket

Current Status: The local league which used to play on Coronation Park has folded in the last 3 years. They used to play with a 'composite ball' to limit the range of batting strikes, and together with loss of voluntary 'ground staff', casual use of the square damaging pitches and insufficient space (the park had to be essentially closed to casual use when matches were played) led to its demise. An artificial strip used to exist at Norton but fell into disrepair and was removed.

There is scope for a cricket square to be created in the middle of the athletics oval/soccer pitch if a club came forward.

Football Pitch

Current facility: There is a practice pitch adjacent to the rugby pitch with steel framed goal posts. The 'goal area' is overused by casual users and requires urgent restoration. A youth team used to be coached there, and Dartmouth AFC used it for practice pitch but due to condition no longer use it.

OSRR Policy Document

This document, prepared by SHDC, and drawing on the Councils 'Playing Pitch Strategy' document, sets out aspirations for expenditure of Section 106 monies and proposals to install at Norton Fields:

MUGA pitch – fenced, hard surfaced multi use games pitch

All weather Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP)

The aspiration of having an artificial pitch poses several conflicting requirements

To maximise use the facility would have to be secure and floodlit.

The type of surface will be specific to a single sport as the characteristics required by governing bodies are always specific to each individual sport, i.e. hockey, football and rugby. There is little overlap to allow competitive sport to be played by all sports on a single AGP type (e.g. contact sports cannot use hockey surface, full contact rugby cannot be carried out on football artificial pitches). The only overlap is for training purposes.

How this would be let (charges set by whom), managed (out of hours use) would be critical to its success.

Basketball

We have received a detailed proposal for a high standard half court all weather pitch identified by an Academy graduate. An up-specified MUGA facility could possibly incorporate this use. Security, charging and managing would have to be addressed.

Conclusions

It would appear that the site area is insufficient to retain and increase all the facilities outlined above.

With any installation of fenced, secured all-weather pitches there will be an inevitable loss of “grassed area” (MUGA, skateboard, bowls, club house(s) storage units) which will impact on casual use of green space.

For clubs to be able to “match fund” they will require long lease status – how is this to be achieved?

Introduction of hard surface facilities will require to be secure (fenced with CCTV?), floodlit (planning) and charging regime defined.

The challenge for our deliberations is to define what criteria are to be used to rank or grade these disparate users?

How will casual use, or affordable public access be managed to secure sports facilities?

Are there other sites available to accommodate any of the above developments?