

# **Dartford Development Policies Plan**

*Playing Pitch Study 2016*

**DARTFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**June 2016**

## Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>2. Aims &amp; Objectives .....</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>3. Policy Context.....</b>	<b>1</b>
National Planning Policy .....	1
Local Policies .....	2
Sport England Guidance.....	3
<b>4. Methodology.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>5. Previous Study Findings .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Cricket .....	5
Football .....	5
Hockey .....	5
Rugby Union.....	6
Recommendations .....	6
<b>6. Current Supply of Playing Pitches.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Existing Playing Pitches .....	6
Pitches Delivered Since 2006 .....	8
Survey Findings .....	9
Planned Pitch Provision .....	9
<b>7. Participation Levels &amp; Future Demand .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Existing Population and Sports Participation Rates .....	9
Market Segmentation .....	11
Survey Findings .....	13
Future Demand by Sport.....	13
Cricket .....	13
Football .....	14
Rugby Union.....	17
Hockey .....	18
<b>8. Current &amp; Future Pitch Requirements .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Demand for pitches 2015.....	20
Cricket .....	21
Football .....	22
Rugby Union.....	22
Hockey .....	22

Demand for pitches 2026.....	22
Cricket .....	23
Football .....	24
Rugby Union.....	24
Hockey .....	24
<b>9. Conclusions &amp; Recommendations .....</b>	<b>24</b>
Supply of pitches.....	25
Pitch quality .....	25
Current and future demand for pitches.....	25
Cricket .....	25
Football .....	26
Rugby Union.....	26
Hockey .....	27
Overall summary and policy recommendations .....	27

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Access to high quality open spaces and opportunity for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Dartford Borough Council is committed to reducing health inequality and promoting active and healthy lifestyles and to increasing the opportunity for participating in sporting, cultural and leisure activities. The provision of playing pitches for formal sporting activity will help contribute to these strategic aims.
- 1.2 The Council's Local Plan policies provide for the delivery of sports and recreation facilities as well as protecting existing ones. National planning policy states that local planning authorities should investigate and assess the need to provide sport and recreation facilities and establish whether there are quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses in provision. The assessment of need to support the Council's Core Strategy policies was originally undertaken in the Dartford Borough Playing Pitch Study, 2006.
- 1.3 This study will update previous work to form an up-to-date assessment of need and establish the current situation in the Borough regarding both supply of existing and planned pitches, and evidence of demand for new pitches.

## **2. Aims & Objectives**

- 2.1 In the Borough there are a wide range of sporting facilities including built sports, outdoor sports and countryside pursuits, catering for all ages and differing levels of physical capability enabling the local community to participate at all levels in sport, recreation and leisure. However, the Playing Pitch Study (2006) identifies shortfalls in some types of playing pitches, both at that point in time and taking into account future population growth. Since that study was undertaken a number of large new residential developments are under construction or have obtained planning consent in Dartford. In some of these cases proposals will deliver additional playing pitches for residents. Other projects elsewhere have also delivered new provision to address demand. Thus the evidence on playing pitch provision and future demand requires reassessment including consideration of changes to demand for specific types of sports pitches that may have occurred since 2006.
- 2.2 An updated Playing Pitch Study will provide a strategic framework to support and increase protection of playing fields and pitches through local planning policy, whether or not they are afforded other regulatory protection, and to inform requirements where new development or funding opportunities arise during the plan period. It will help to create an evidence-based document that will be of benefit to multiple users including Dartford Borough Council officers; sports clubs; schools; National Governing Bodies for sport; other sport and leisure providers in the area, and will provide an evidence base for determining planning applications.

- 2.3 This study will cover the following playing pitches and outdoor pitch sports:
- Football
  - Cricket
  - Rugby Union
  - Hockey
  - Other playing pitch types as found in the Sports England definition of playing pitches (although it is unlikely that other types of pitch provision can be found within Dartford and that there will be future demand for these types)
- 2.4 The playing pitch study will:
- Assess existing playing pitches facilities in the above-mentioned sports in terms of quantity, quality, size and type, usage, surplus capacity and community access;
  - Help to understand current and projected supply of and demand for playing pitches;
  - Help to identify whether or not sufficient pitches of good quality and which support the needs of each sport and club in Dartford are available, or are secured through planning consent;
  - Help identify that provision is sufficient and flexible enough to deal with current and projected increases in demand;
  - Consider options addressing any identified shortfall and provision for future demand;
  - Reflect sports' local circumstances and consider national policy and Sport England guidance, to provide an evidence base for the Development Policies Plan;
  - Provide a focus for future investment in sports and leisure facilities within the Borough;
  - Help provide an evidence base for determining planning applications; and
  - Be provided in a form whereby it can be updated as changes occur or where new information becomes available.

### 3. Policy Context

#### ***National Planning Policy***

- 3.1 Chapter 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) concerns the promotion of healthy communities, and contains a number of paragraphs which make reference to the provision of sports and recreation facilities. Paragraph 70 states:

*“To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should... plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as... sports venues) ...to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments”*

- 3.2 Paragraph 73 states:

*“Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or*

*surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required”*

- 3.3 The NPPF also seeks to safeguard existing open space and sport and recreation facilities. Paragraph 74 states:

*“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:*

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss”.*

#### **Local Policies**

- 3.4 The Council’s Corporate Plan 2014-17 contains a strategic aim to reduce health inequality in Dartford and to provide for a rich and varied quality of life. This is expressed in two strategic objectives of increasing the opportunity for participation in sporting, cultural and leisure activities; and to reduce overall health inequalities in the Borough.
- 3.5 Dartford’s Core Strategy emphasises leisure, recreation and open space in the following strategic objectives:
- An accessible and enticing Thames Waterfront with a high quality built and natural environment, offering a range of leisure and recreational opportunities*
  - A green borough that is resilient to the effects of climate change and offers a high quality of life, with an enhanced network of landscaped paths, cycle routes, open spaces and biodiversity habitats and corridors, and with links to the countryside and the Thames*
  - A full range of opportunities to enjoy first class cultural and leisure pursuits as well as sport and recreation, particularly at Dartford Town Centre, Eastern Quarry, Ebbsfleet, Stone Lodge, and Swanscombe*
- 3.6 Specific policies in the Borough’s Core Strategy provide for new, and protect existing, sports and recreation facilities. Core Strategy Policy CS14 commits the Council to implementing “a multi-functional, high quality, varied and well-managed Green Grid”. It requires new development to make a contribution to the Green Grid and seeks to protect and enhance existing open spaces, which include playing pitches. Core Strategy Policy CS22 protects existing sports and recreation facilities, and requires community sports facilities to be provided at major development sites.

- 3.7 Policy DP21 in Dartford's emerging Development Policies Plan continues this approach and includes the provision of new sport and recreation facilities where they are in an appropriate location and of a scale and type reflecting the communities they will serve. Policy DP24 continues the approach of the Core Strategy and sets strict criteria for the development of open spaces. The policy requires robust evidence to demonstrate that the loss of any playing pitches is justified on the basis that they are surplus to existing and future requirements. Open spaces, including playing pitches, are identified on the policies map, although criteria may also apply where pitches are confirmed but have not been directly identified on the map.
- 3.8 Policy DP23 allocates land as Protected Local Green Space (PLGS). This designation means that, in general, development will not be permitted unless very special circumstances apply, giving these spaces equivalent policy protection to Green Belt land. Overall, 27 areas of land are identified as PLGS, a number of which include playing pitches which contribute towards the open space being of very special local significance.
- 3.9 The Development Policies Plan is supported by an Open Space Paper setting out the approach of policies DP23 and DP24 (among others) in protecting open spaces in the Borough. This paper outlines the selection criteria for designating PLGS land and in identifying Borough Open Space (BOS) on the Policies Map.

#### ***Sport England Guidance***

- 3.10 Sport England's *Planning for Sport Aims & Objectives* Guide promotes a planned approach to the provision of sports facilities. Sport England's planning objectives are to:
- Protect existing facilities
  - Enhance the quality, accessibility and management of existing facilities
  - Provide new facilities to meet demand
- 3.11 Sport England have also produced guidance on undertaking assessments of need for indoor and outdoor sports facilities and for preparing playing pitch strategies, which will be taken into account in the preparation of this study.

## **4. Methodology**

- 4.1 The Study identifies the existing supply of, and future demand for, playing pitches. It seeks to identify future demand for playing pitches in the Borough and shortfalls/surplus in provision.
- 4.2 This study updates key aspects of previous work undertaken in 2006 with relevant up-to-date data from a range of local, national, qualitative and quantitative sources. A full strategy in terms of covering all non-planning sporting issues is not considered to be timely given the advanced stage of the emerging Development Policies Plan and the context of Dartford continuing to deliver the strategic objectives set out in the adopted Core Strategy. Further work will be undertaken when the Council reviews its Core Strategy in the future. This review is scheduled to take place over the next three years.

- 4.3 The Playing Pitch Study adapts the Sport England methodology for a playing pitch strategy including its aims to protect; enhance, and provide playing pitches in the Borough. It is important to note that this study does not necessarily constitute a full Playing Pitch Strategy in terms of all stipulations in Sport England's guidance. The Council has applied this guidance where necessary, and its principles have informed the study, leading to evidence that is both robust, NPPF compliant and effective in relation to Dartford's development needs over the remainder of the plan period. The Study is a fit for purpose document that underpins both Dartford's Local Plan and future opportunities that have potential to arise.
- 4.4 The study reviews the findings of the 2006 Dartford Borough Playing Pitch Study and its recommendations in terms of providing new playing pitches for the four main pitch-based sports, namely: cricket; football; rugby union, and hockey.
- 4.5 The study then assesses the current supply of playing pitches. The data collection process on the supply side includes an audit of all playing pitches in Dartford using Sport England and local data. For each site, the following information has been collected:
- i. Site name, location, ownership and management type;
  - ii. Number and type of pitches;
  - iii. Accessibility of pitches to the community;
  - iv. Overall quality of pitches and ancillary facilities (including maintenance type);
  - v. Level of protection and security of tenure such as ownership and tenure; and,
  - vi. Views of users and providers.
- 4.6 The assessment included sending out questionnaires to playing pitch providers in the borough, both private and public, as well as sports clubs. The returned questionnaires have been used to augment existing national and local data on playing pitches held by the Council. The questionnaires cover the type of sports played, the type and quality of surface, ownership details, and information on the users of the facility. They also ask respondents to identify and comment on problem areas such as funding, accessibility issues, relationships with other providers, and membership recruitment, etc. This has helped to build a comprehensive overview of facilities in the Borough.
- 4.7 To assess demand for playing pitches, the study considers findings from the latest Active People Survey and trends over time in relation to general sports participation, physical activity levels and sports market segmentation data to give an overall picture of the situation in the Borough. Demand in relation to the four main pitch-based sports is then assessed using Sport England data on participation levels, data from the national associations for each sport, and local data from existing sports clubs.
- 4.8 Current and future pitch requirements are then assessed by updating the Playing Pitch Model used in the 2006 study to reflect the current levels of demand for pitches, and then projecting forward to 2026 in line with the Borough's expected levels of population growth. The study then concludes by outlining both the current and future surplus/deficit in pitch provision for

each sport, and makes several recommendations, both generally and for each individual sport in order to help deliver the required provision in future.

## 5. Previous Study Findings

5.1 The 2006 Playing Pitch Study was prepared as a background evidence document in support of the Council's Core Strategy. It assessed four pitch sports – cricket, football, hockey, and rugby union. The Study was prepared by Groundwork Kent Thameside alongside the Council, and was prepared in accordance with Sport England's guidance.

5.2 The Study sought the views of local sports clubs, pitch providers, schools and colleges, governing bodies and league secretaries through consultation. It also contained an audit of existing playing pitches and ancillary facilities to assess their quality. The Study then identified current supply and demand and modelled future demand in the Borough using the Sport England Playing Pitch Methodology in order to determine any surplus or shortfall in provision.

### *Cricket*

5.3 The Study found that there were 11 pitches available for community use in 2006. There were 6 clubs based in the area comprising 33 teams. There was a surplus in 2006 of 7.6 senior pitches at the time of peak demand. The Study projected that in 2011 there would be a surplus of 7.3 senior pitches at the time of peak demand.

### *Football*

5.4 Football pitches can be divided into senior, junior and mini soccer pitches. The following dimensions apply:

- Senior pitches must be between 45m x 90m and 90m x 120m
- Junior pitches must be between 30m x 45m and 35m x 50m for 7-a-side games, and between 45m x 60m and 50m x 67m for 9-a-side games
- Mini soccer pitches must be between 20m x 30m and 25m x 35m for 5-a-side games, and 30m x 45m and 35m x 50m for 7-a-side games

5.5 The Study found that there were 35 senior, 20 junior and 12 mini soccer pitches available for community use in 2006. There were 136 teams playing in the Borough (74 senior, 62 junior, 42 mini). There was a surplus in 2006 of 17.5 senior, 0.9 junior and 0.8 mini soccer pitches at the time of peak demand. The Study projected that in 2011 there would be a surplus of 14.1 senior pitches and a deficit of 7.3 junior pitches and 2.6 mini soccer pitches at the time of peak demand.

### *Hockey*

5.6 The Study found that there were 2 grass pitches available for community use in 2006. There were 2 clubs based in the area comprising 9 teams. There were no AstroTurf pitches (ATPs)

available for community use in the Borough, meaning all league matches had to be played outside the Borough.

### *Rugby Union*

- 5.7 The Study found that there were 5 pitches available for community use in 2006. There were 2 clubs based in the area comprising 6 teams. There was a surplus in 2006 of 3.2 pitches at the time of peak demand. The Study projected that in 2011 there would be a surplus of 2.7 pitches at the time of peak demand.

### **Recommendations**

- 5.8 The Study found participation levels in junior cricket, junior hockey and junior rugby should aim to be increased. It also recommended investigating and improving the quality of surplus pitches to ensure their continuing use by communities. The Study advocated the provision of Artificial Turf Pitches (ATPs) for community use, especially to allow hockey league fixtures to take place in the Borough, and to address the projected shortfall in junior and mini soccer pitches through improving quality and providing additional facilities.

## **6. Current Supply of Playing Pitches**

### *Existing Playing Pitches*

- 6.1 The Active Places Power Playing Pitch Audit Report for Dartford identifies 145 existing pitches in the Borough, 126 grass pitches and 19 Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs). The existing playing pitches are split by sport as follows:

**Table 1: Existing Playing Pitches by Sport**

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Sub-Category</b>	<b>No. of Pitches</b>
<b>Football</b>	Adult	40
	Junior	24
	Mini Soccer	12
<b>Cricket</b>		16
<b>Rugby Union</b>	Senior	8
	Junior	3
<b>Rugby League</b>	Senior	1
<b>Rounders / Softball</b>		20
<b>Hockey</b>		2
<b>AGP (Artificial Grass Pitches)</b>		19

6.2 In terms of ownership, the 145 existing pitches are split into the following categories by sport:

**Table 2: Existing Playing Pitches by Ownership and Sport**

Sport	Commercial	Education	Local Authority	Sports Club	Community Organisation	Others
Cricket	1	7	5	2	0	1
Full sized Football	0	15	22	3	0	0
Hockey	0	2	0	0	0	0
Junior Football	0	14	7	2	1	0
Junior Rugby Union	0	3	0	0	0	0
Mini Soccer	0	4	8	0	0	0
Rounders	0	15	0	0	0	0
Senior Rugby League	0	0	1	0	0	0
Senior Rugby Union	0	7	0	1	0	0
Softball	0	5	0	0	0	0
AGP (Rubber Crumb Pile 3G)	11	0	4	0	0	1
AGP (Sand Dressed)	0	2	0	1	0	0

6.3 In terms of access, of the 145 existing pitches, 104 are publicly accessible, with 41 private pitches. The private pitches with no public access are all owned and operated by education providers. These pitches are split by sport as follows:

**Table 3: Existing Playing Pitches by Sport and Access**

Facility Type	Private	Public	Total
Cricket	5	11	16
Full-sized Football	7	33	40
Hockey	2	0	2
Junior Football	9	15	24
Junior Rugby Union	2	1	3
Mini Soccer	2	10	12
Rounders	6	9	15
Senior Rugby League	0	1	1
Senior Rugby Union	4	4	8
Softball	3	2	5
AGP	1	18	19

6.4 Of the 145 existing playing pitches, 141 are operational with 4 pitches deemed 'closed', which are all adult football pitches. 3 of these are local authority owned, and 1 is owned by an education provider. Of the operational pitches, 7 are deemed not to meet the Active Places criteria<sup>1</sup>; these are 3 junior football pitches, 2 mini soccer pitches, 1 cricket pitch and 1 senior

<sup>1</sup> Facilities may not meet Active Places criteria if they do not meet minimum size requirements.

rugby league pitch. These pitches are all local authority owned, with the exception of 1 mini soccer pitch and the cricket pitch, both of which are owned by the same education provider.

***Pitches Delivered Since 2006***

6.5 Since the 2006 Study was undertaken, there have been an additional 25 playing pitches delivered. Of these, 20 are publicly accessible, boosting the percentage of pitches available for community use to over 72%. All but one of the Borough’s Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) have been delivered since 2006, with 2 also being refurbished in 2015. There are 3 sand dressed and 16 rubber crumb pile AGPs.

6.6 Sport England data shows that, since the 2000s, the following pitches have been newly delivered or refurbished in the Borough:

**Table 4: New/Refurbished Pitches delivered since the 2000s**

Facility Type	New	Refurbished
Cricket	1	3
Junior Football	2	3
Mini Soccer	5	0
Full-sized Football	4	12
Senior Rugby League	1	1
AGP	18	2

6.7 As the table above illustrates, there have been a number of refurbishments carried out in the Borough over the past 15 years. In total, 52 pitches have been newly provided and/or refurbished over this period. This demonstrates Dartford’s commitment to improving the quality of its existing facilities as well as enabling the provision of new pitches to meet increased need.

6.8 Since 2006, one of the major developments providing new pitches for community use has been Princes Park, incorporating a 4,100 capacity stadium, home to Dartford FC, and additional community facilities, including three AGPs. Similarly, Goals Soccer Centre, at Green Street Green Road, providing 11 AGPs, was opened in 2008. Princes Park also caters for Millwall Ladies FC who train and play some of their home games at the stadium. This strong link has ensured a thriving environment for women’s football at under 13, 14, 15 and 16 level as well as presenting an opportunity for local senior players to participate at the second highest tier of the ladies game in England.

6.9 Dartford FC’s Community Outreach Programme has also bolstered participation in junior football through strategically placed ‘outreach sites’ at local schools as well as the community pitches available at Princes Park. There is also high demand for Mini Pitches at Princes Park at peak periods (evenings and weekends). The Council continues to work closely with the Club to encourage participation and help to meet its Corporate Objectives on health and wellbeing and community engagement.

- 6.10 In Spring 2014 the Council awarded grant funding to Dartford Cricket Club to facilitate the building of a new cricket pavilion and associated facilities at the Club's Hesketh Park ground. This project was completed by April 2015 and the club also received a grant from the ECB to provide improved training facilities including a 4 lane net facility.

### ***Survey Findings***

- 6.11 Questionnaires were issued to pitch providers and sports clubs as part of this study. Clubs were asked to comment on the quality of the pitches they play on. All of the respondents considered overall pitch quality to be good or acceptable. The only aspects considered poor were the availability/quality of parking facilities at some pitches; however, some pitches used by clubs did not have appropriate ancillary facilities such as changing rooms.

### ***Planned Pitch Provision***

- 6.12 There are several sports pitches planned as part of major developments in the Borough. These have been agreed via Section 106 agreements.
- 6.13 The area covered by the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation contains commitments to 15 new pitches through Section 106 agreements. 10 of these will be provided in the Eastern Quarry site, with a further 2 at the Northfleet West substation/Ebbsfleet Green site. A further 3 pitches are committed in the Ebbsfleet Valley area closer to Ebbsfleet International Station.
- 6.14 The Bridge site has commitments to provide 2ha of sports facilities, whilst the Northern Gateway site will provide a Multi-Use Games Area incorporating 5-a-side football facilities.
- 6.15 The 'closed' facilities at the Acacia site in Central Park are currently only being partially utilised, but there are plans to upgrade the wider sports facilities at the site that may include ancillary facilities such as changing rooms. Further provision of sports facilities is also expected to occur at the Stone Lodge site, in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS22.

## **7. Participation Levels & Future Demand**

### ***Existing Population and Sports Participation Rates***

- 7.1 The population of Dartford numbered 97,365 at the time of the 2011 Census. Office for National Statistics (ONS) Mid-Year Population Estimates put the Borough's population at 102,200 in mid-2014<sup>2</sup>, growth of around 4.73% since the Census was taken. The Borough's population is forecasted to grow to 134,400 by 2026<sup>3</sup>, and is estimated to have grown by around 16% over the 10 year period 2004-2014<sup>4</sup>.
- 7.2 Data taken from the Active People Survey shows the change in sports participation rates in Dartford over time for adults aged 16+. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below, which shows that

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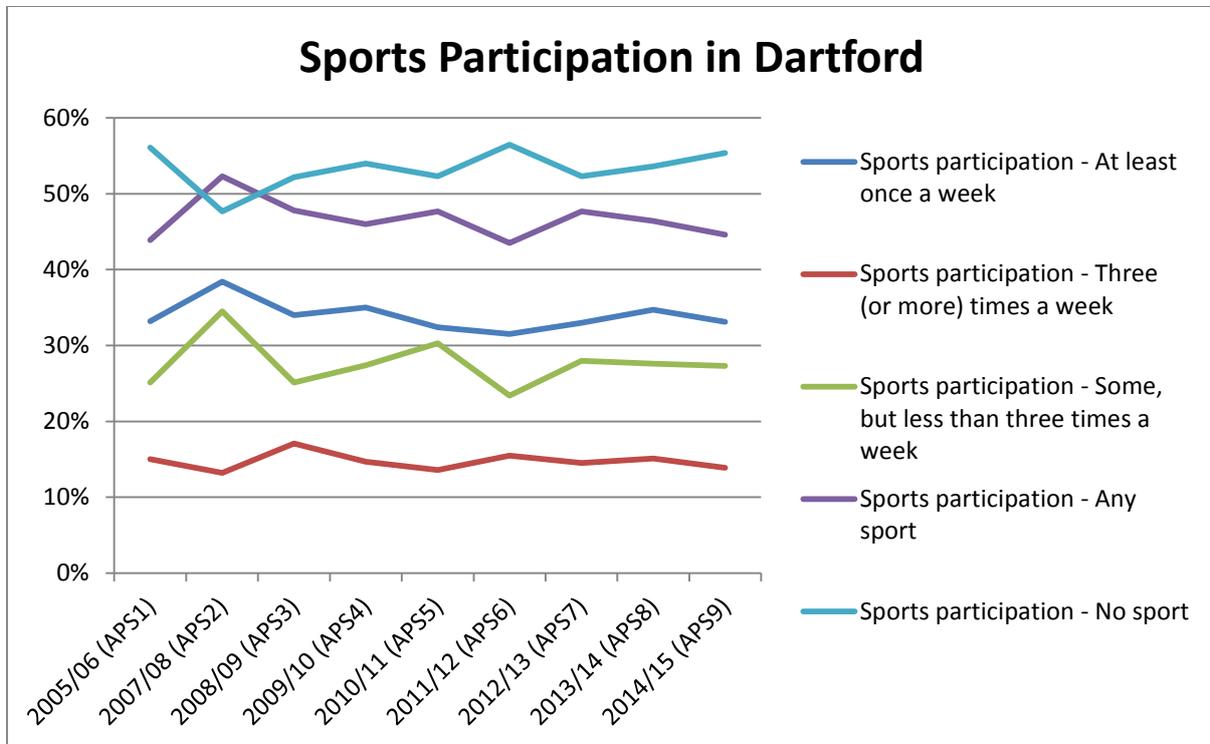
<sup>2</sup> ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates, 2014

<sup>3</sup> KCC Population Forecasts, 2014

<sup>4</sup> KCC Time Series of Mid-Year Population Estimates 1995-2014

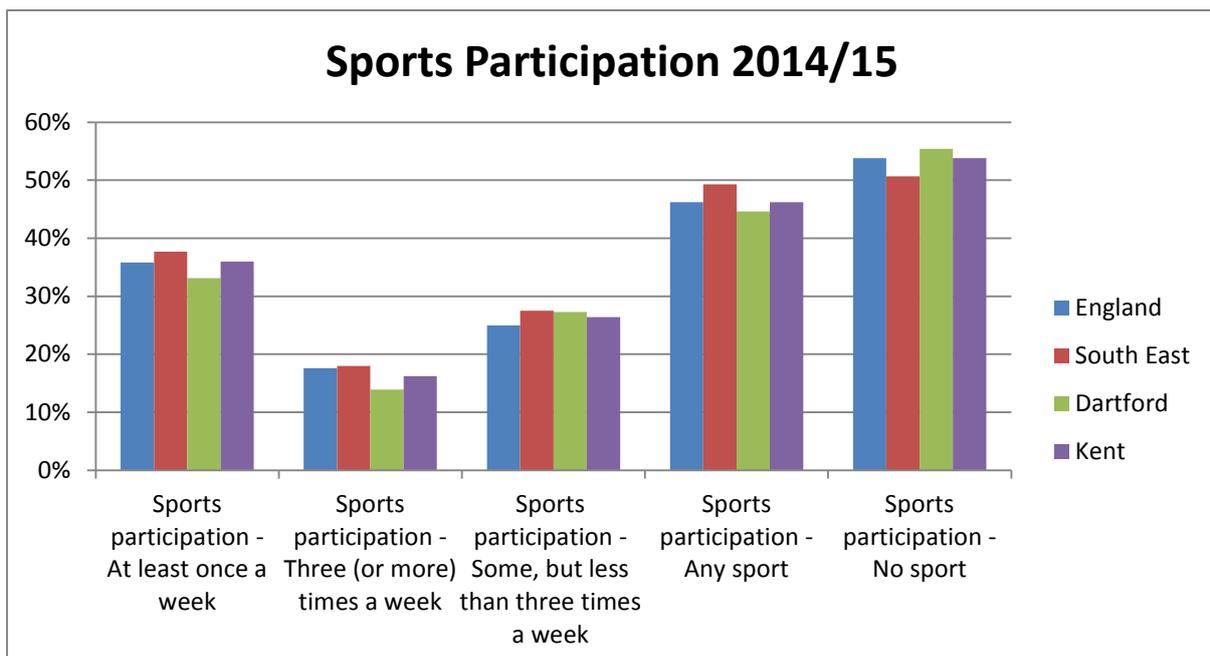
there has been a marginal decline in sports participation in the Borough and a rise in people not partaking in any sporting activity.

**Figure 1: Sports Participation in Dartford**



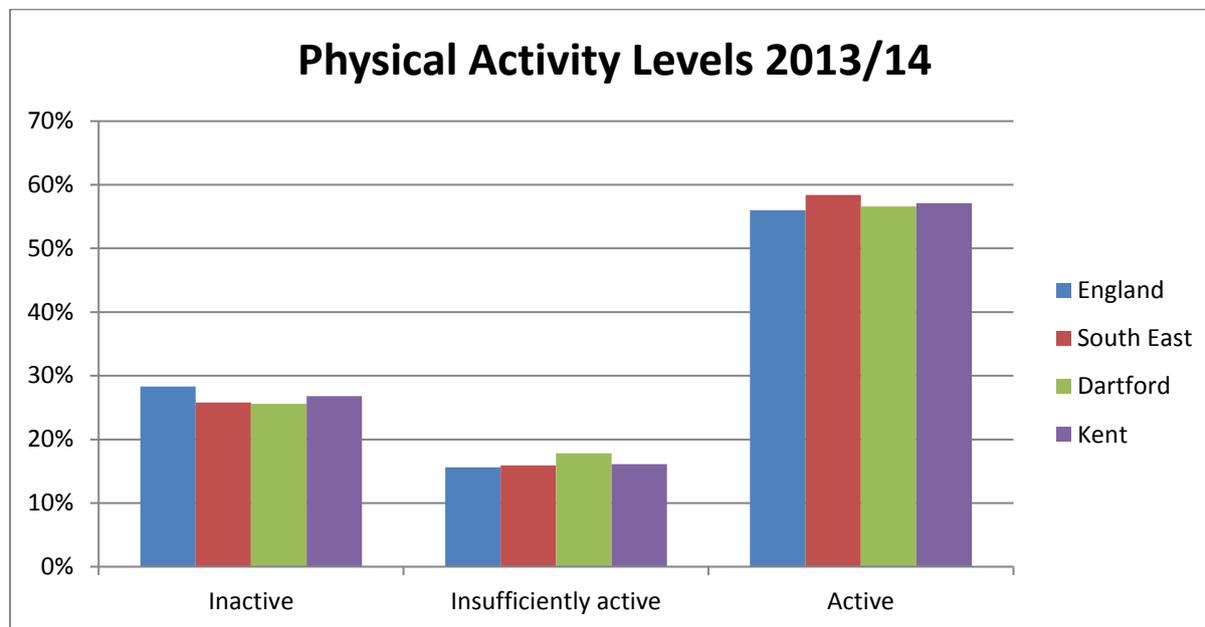
7.3 Figure 2 below shows that Dartford has generally lower levels of sports participation than the Kent, South East and England averages, and a higher proportion of people undertaking no sporting activity.

**Figure 2: Sports Participation 2014/15**



7.4 When looking at wider physical activity levels, Dartford has a higher proportion of people deemed insufficiently active when looking at minutes per week of moderate or vigorous physical activity, when compared to the averages for Kent, the South East and England, as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Physical Activity Levels 2013/14**



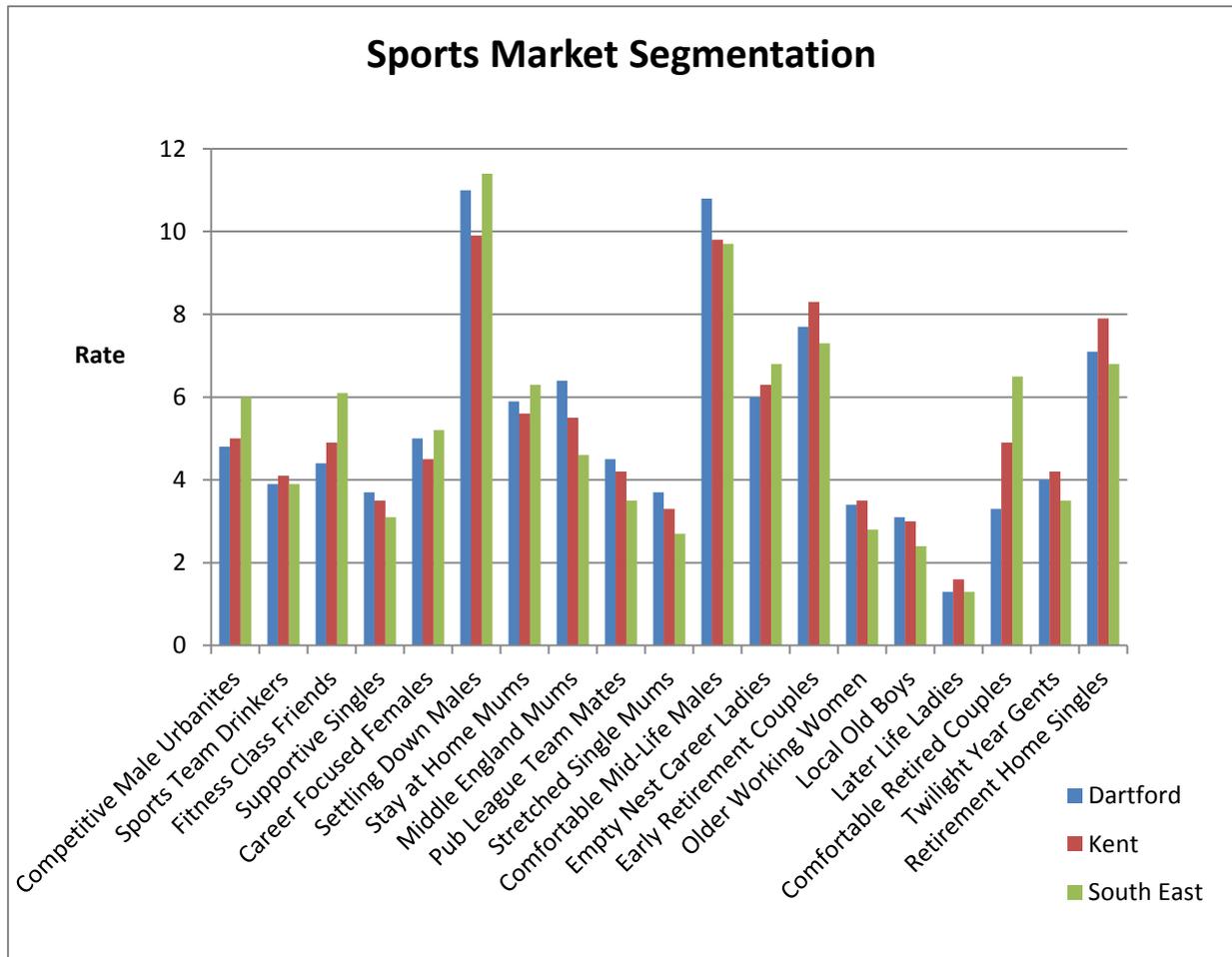
7.5 In Dartford, Active People Survey data shows that there is an overall latent demand for sporting facilities in 2014/15, based on the 55.3% of respondents who said they would like to undertake more sport. This is marginally lower than the Kent and South East averages (55.5% and 57.7% respectively). However, the percentage of those currently deemed inactive who expressed a desire to participate in more sport (32.7%) is higher than the Kent and South East averages (24.4% and 25.1% respectively).

**Market Segmentation**

7.6 Sport England’s Market Segmentation data is designed to help understand the life stages and attitudes of different population groups. It builds on data from the Active People Survey, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport’s Taking Part Survey, and the Mosaic tool from Experian, which has been used in other planning and demographic data. It presents a picture of the dominant social groups in each area, and puts people’s sporting behaviour in the context of complex lives.

7.7 The dominant market segments in Dartford, compared to Kent and the wider South East are illustrated in Figure 4 below. These are expressed as a proportion of the adult population.

Figure 4: Sports Market Segmentation – Dominant Segments



7.8 Figure 4 illustrates that Dartford follows similar trends to those of Kent and the wider South East, with some exceptions. There are generally a higher proportion of those in mid-life compared to those of retirement age in the Borough when compared to the Kent and South East figures. The most dominant segments in Dartford, all of which have a rate of over 7, are:

- Settling Down Males – sporty male professionals, buying a house and settling down with partner. Likely to take part in sport on a regular basis, the most popular types of sport for this segment are cycling, keep fit/gym, swimming and football. People in this segment are also more likely to take part in organised sport compared to the rest of the population.
- Comfortable Mid-Life Males – mid-life professional, sporty males with older children and more time for themselves. With sporting activity levels above the national average, the most popular types of sport for this segment are cycling, keep fit/gym, swimming and football. Again, participation in organised sport is higher than the national average.
- Early Retirement Couples – free time couples nearing the end of their careers. They are slightly less active than the average adult population, and are less likely to take part in organised sport, although golf and fitness club membership are exceptions. The most popular sport for this segment is swimming, although keep fit/gym, cycling and golf are also significant.

- Retirement Home Singles – retired singles or widowers, predominantly female, living in sheltered accommodation. They are much less active than the average adult population, but their activity levels are consistent with other segments in this age range. The top sports for this segment are keep fit/gym, swimming and bowls. Around 15% of this segment are members of a club to participate in sport.

7.9 For the purposes of playing pitch provision, market segmentation information shows that providing adequate football facilities, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, will be important to cater for the sporting needs of the dominant market segments in the Borough. The two most dominant segments (settling down males and comfortable mid-life males) are likely to participate in organised sport and football is one of the top sports within these segments. Many of the other groups identified are likely to participate in formal and informal recreation outside of the scope of this study.

### ***Survey Findings***

7.10 The pitch provider questionnaires asked owners to comment on unmet demand for use of their playing pitches. Most respondents did not consider there to be widespread unmet demand, although some pointed to oversubscription of their pitches at peak times (i.e. Saturdays) and clubs wishing to hire facilities on Sundays, when some providers' facilities were unavailable.

### ***Future Demand by Sport***

7.11 In order to assess future demand for playing pitches it is useful to analyse each of the main sports in turn.

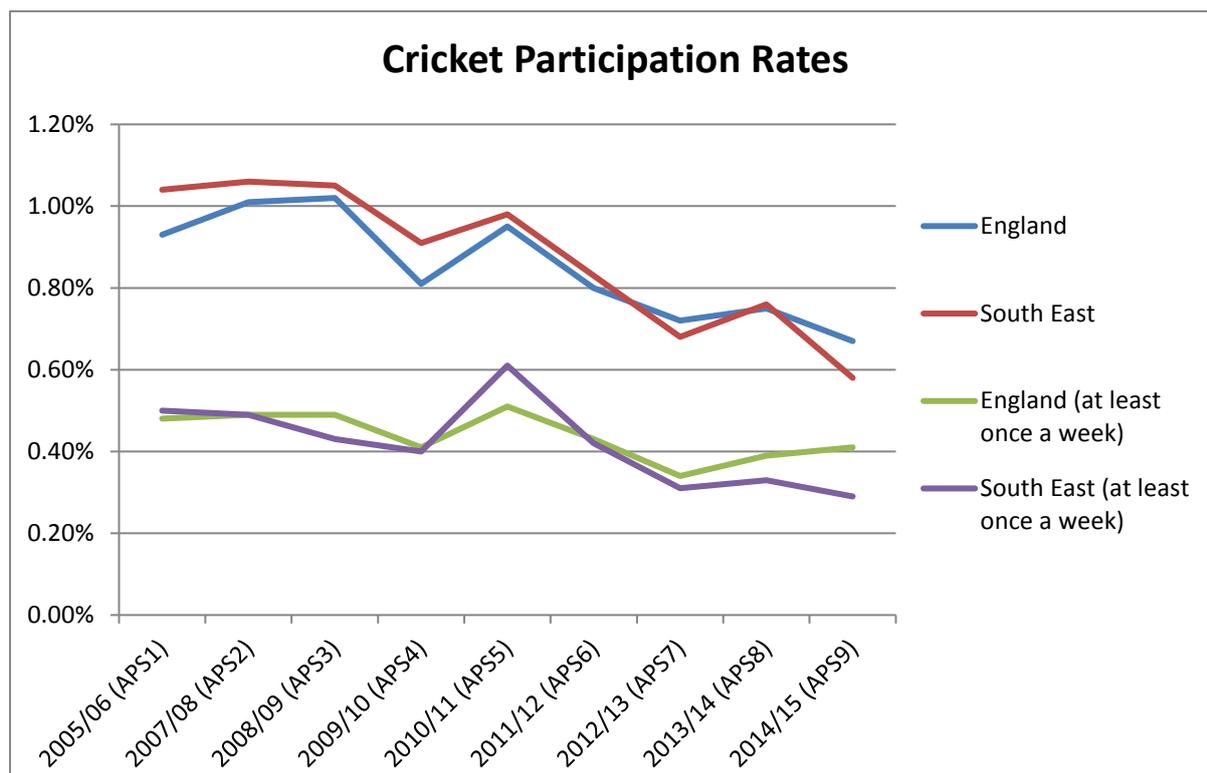
#### *Cricket*

7.12 There are 16 existing cricket pitches in the Borough, one of which does not meet Active Places criteria and cannot therefore be deemed fully fit for purpose. This is the pitch at the North Kent College in Wilmington, which was also identified in the 2006 Study. 11 of the 16 pitches are publicly accessible. 25% of grounds have been refurbished or reprovided since 2000.

7.13 Local data indicates that there are currently 8 cricket clubs active in the Borough, comprised of at least 14 Saturday teams and 7 Sunday teams. There are also 18 junior teams run by these clubs.

7.14 Participation levels for cricket taken from the Active People Survey are 0.67% for England and 0.58% for the South East. For those participating in cricket at least once a week, this rate drops to 0.41% and 0.29% respectively. The change in participation rates over time is illustrated in Figure 5 below, which indicates that there has been a general decline in cricket participation since 2005/06 both nationally and in the South East. 2005/06 is likely to be an exceptional high point in cricket participation due to the after-effects of the England team's victory in the Ashes series against Australia, the first time England had won this event for 20 years.

Figure 5: Cricket Participation Rates



7.15 Taking into account the current South East participation rate of 0.58%, and Dartford’s most recent population estimates<sup>5</sup>, it can be deduced that there may be around 606 potential cricketers in the Borough currently (2015). Projecting forward to 2026, the expected population profile of the Borough indicates a potential pool of players of approximately 780, based on the same participation levels.

7.16 Data from the National Cricket Survey undertaken by the ECB in 2014 indicates that, nationally, 70% of adult amateur cricket is played on a Saturday. Of those playing in teams, 29% of participants are ‘Core’ players who play at least 12 weeks of a 26 week season; 48% are ‘Occasional’ players, between 3 and 11 weeks, and 23% are ‘Cameo’ players, playing 1-2 weeks a season.

7.17 Using the ECB data, taking the median availability for each player type, it can be deduced that, for any one playing day, around 35.5 players are available per 100 possible players. Taking into account Dartford’s potential pool of players, this would equate to approximately 214 available players, and around 19 potential teams. Were other variables (i.e. current participation levels and player availability levels) to remain constant, the available players would rise to 277 by 2026, based on population growth. This equates to around 25 teams.

*Football*

7.18 There are currently 76 grass football pitches in the Borough. These consist of 40 adult pitches, 24 junior pitches, and 12 mini soccer pitches. 4 adult pitches are currently closed and

<sup>5</sup> KCC Population Forecasts, 2014

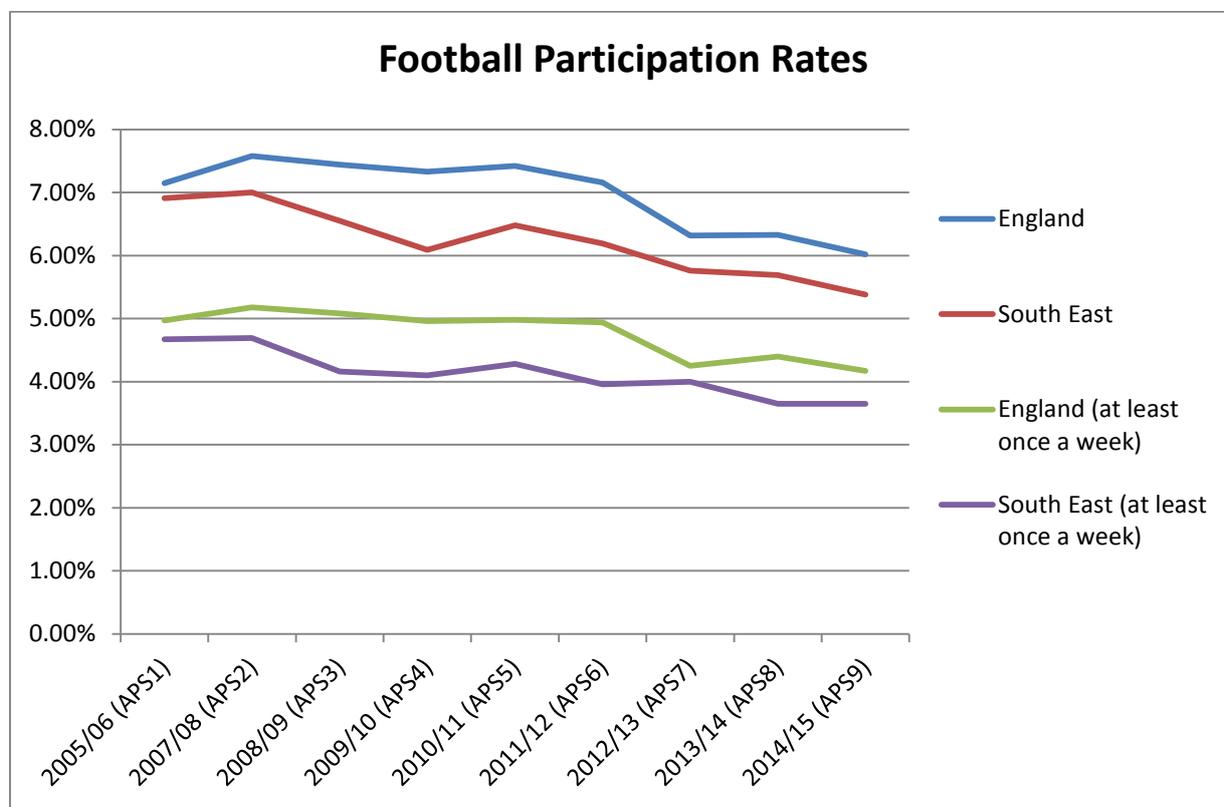
therefore not available for use. A further 3 junior pitches and 2 mini soccer pitches do not appear to meet Active Places criteria and therefore cannot be deemed fully fit for purpose. Three of the four closed pitches are at the Acacia Sports Centre, which closed in February 2016. The three junior and one of the mini soccer pitches not meeting Active Places Criteria are within Central Park in Dartford. The remaining inoperative pitches are at education facilities.

7.19 In terms of access, 33 adult, 15 junior and 10 mini soccer pitches are publicly accessible. 16 adult, 5 junior and 5 mini soccer pitches have been newly provided and/or refurbished since 2000.

7.20 A 2013 report by the FA on football participation in Dartford for the 2012/13 season showed a total of 53 affiliated clubs with a total of 243 teams, 213 of which play in Dartford. Of these 213 teams, 62 (29.1%) were adult teams, 90 (42.3%) were youth teams and 61 (28.6%) were mini soccer teams.

7.21 Football has the highest participation of any team sport in the country; however participation rates have generally been falling over time. Participation levels for football taken from the latest Active People Survey are 6.02% for England and 5.38% for the South East. For those participating in football at least once a week, this rate drops to 4.17% and 3.65% respectively. The change in participation rates over time is illustrated in Figure 6 below.

**Figure 6: Football Participation Rates**



7.22 The FA’s football participation report for Dartford uses ‘conversion rates’ to estimate the number of people playing football in the local area, based on the following assumptions:

- 18 players involved in an 11-a-side squad
- 10 players in a mini soccer team squad
- 12 players in a 9 v 9 team squad
- 9 players in a 7 v 7 team squad
- 8 players in 6 v 6 and 5 v 5 team squads
- 6 players in a 4 v 4 team squad

7.23 The report indicates a total number of players in Dartford for 2012/13 of 3,233 across all formats. As a proportion of the relevant population (ages 5 to 44), this gives an overall conversion rate of 6.1%. This is illustrated in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Football Participation in Dartford 2012/13**

2012/13	Adult		Youth		Mini-Soccer	All Forms
	11-a-side		All Formats			
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Mixed	Total
<b>Teams</b>	58	4	85	5	61	213
<b>Players</b>	1044	72	1438	69	610	3233
<b>Conversion Rate</b>	5.5%	0.4%	29.4%	1.5%	14.5%	6.1%

7.24 Dartford’s conversion rate compares favourably with the South East and England rates for the same period, which were 5.5% and 5.2% respectively.

7.25 Using 2015 population figures<sup>6</sup> with the conversion rates from 2012/13, the following team and player totals can be deduced:

- 3752 players across all forms of the game
- 1166 adult male players and 86 female players – 65 and 5 teams respectively
- 1793 male youth players and 87 female youth players – approximately 106 male and 6 female teams (based on 2012/13 team structures)
- 1001 mini soccer players – 100 teams

There are therefore an estimated 282 teams across all formats currently (2015). Using the 2012/13 club to team ratio identified in the FA report, this equates to around 71 clubs.

7.26 Projecting forward to 2026, using the same conversion rates against projected population growth, gives the following player totals:

- 4856 players across all forms of the game
- 1469 adult male players and 110 adult female players – 82 and 6 teams respectively
- 2411 male youth players and 119 female youth players – approximately 143 male and 9 female teams (based on 2012/13 team structures)
- 1349 mini soccer players – 135 teams

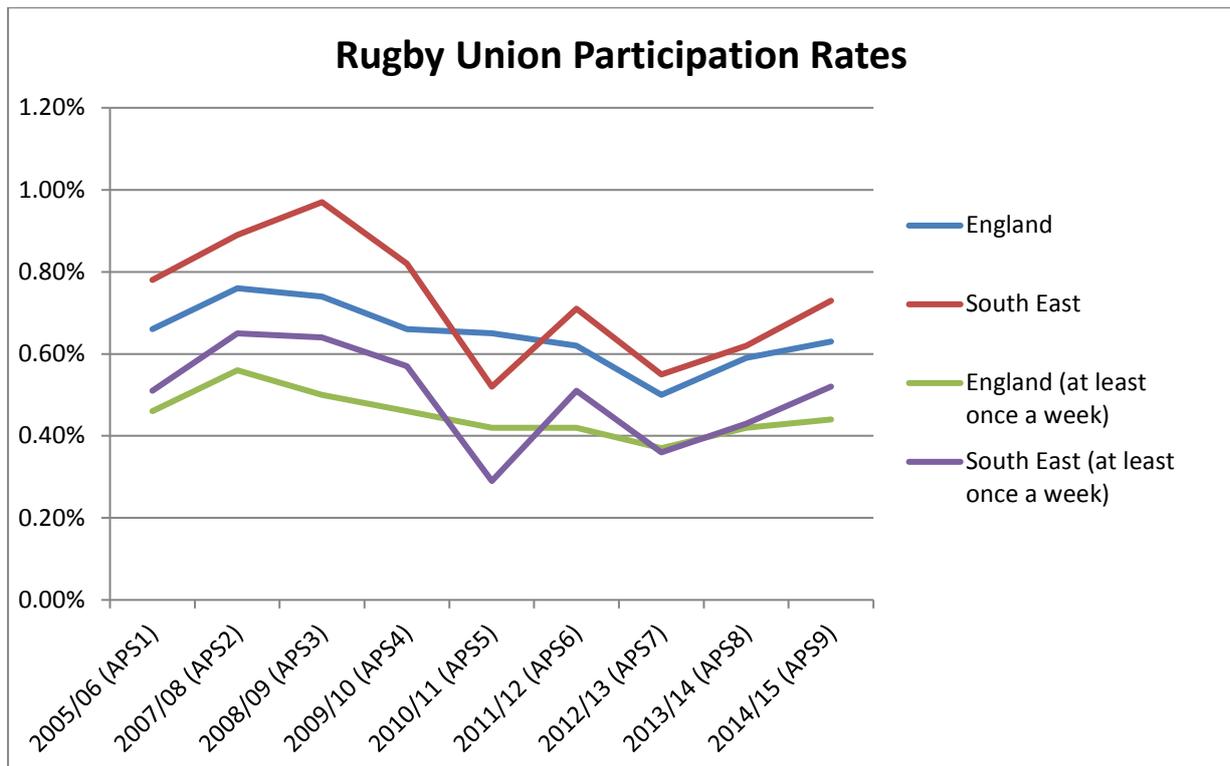
<sup>6</sup> KCC Population Forecasts, 2014

There will therefore be an estimated total of 375 teams across all formats by 2026. Using the 2012/13 club to team ratio identified in the FA report, this equates to around 94 clubs.

*Rugby Union*

- 7.27 There are 11 rugby union pitches in the Borough, comprised of 8 senior and 3 junior pitches, all of which are operational. All but one of these pitches are owned by education providers, with the remaining pitch provided by Bexley Park Sports and Social Club. 4 senior pitches and 1 junior pitch are publicly accessible. There have been no newly provided or refurbished rugby union pitches since 2000.
- 7.28 There are currently 2 rugby clubs in the Borough, comprised of 6 senior and at least 6 junior teams. There are approximately 25 squad members per senior team.
- 7.29 Participation levels for rugby union taken from the latest Active People Survey are 0.63% for England and 0.73% for the South East. For those participating in rugby union at least once a week, this rate drops to 0.44% and 0.52% respectively. This is illustrated in Figure 7 below. Participation rates for rugby union are variable, especially in the South East, although they are generally higher in this region than the national rate.

**Figure 7: Rugby Union Participation Rates**



- 7.30 Taking into account the current South East participation rate of 0.73%, and Dartford’s most recent population estimates<sup>7</sup>, it can be deduced that there may be around 763 potential rugby union players in the Borough currently (2015). Projecting forward to 2026, the expected

<sup>7</sup> KCC Population Forecasts, 2014

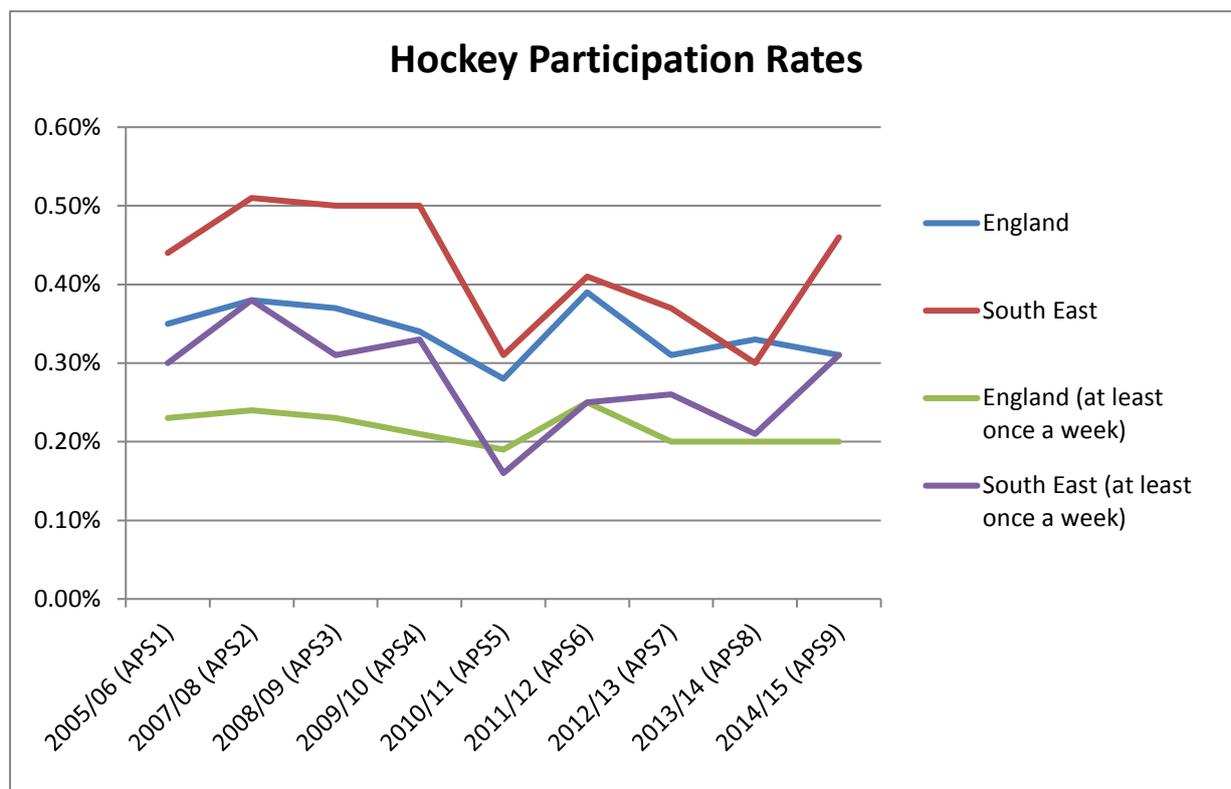
population profile of the Borough indicates a potential pool of players of approximately 981, based on the same participation levels.

- 7.31 There is no reliable national data in terms of average player availability levels for rugby union. Based on the fact that rugby union is a winter sport, players may be more regularly available than cricketers given that they are less likely to be on holiday and less likely to be undertaking other forms of outdoor recreation in colder winter conditions. The game is also shorter, requiring less time commitment from potential players. If we therefore assume that 40 of every 100 players are regularly available to play club rugby, this would equate to around 305 players and around 12 teams currently. Projecting forward to 2026 and using the same assumptions, the pool of available players rises to 392, which equates to around 16 teams.

#### *Hockey*

- 7.32 There are 2 grass hockey pitches in the Borough, both of which are owned by education providers which are not publicly accessible. There have been no new or refurbished pitches provided since 2000. Hockey league matches must be played on artificial grass pitches (AGPs). At the time of the 2006 study, there were no AGPs available to play league matches in the Borough or for community use; however, since that study was undertaken, there have been 18 AGPs provided in Dartford. This may have negated the need for the further provision of grass pitches.
- 7.33 Since 2015, there is now only one hockey club in the Borough, Dartford Hockey Club (formerly known as Crackenford Hockey Club). Dartford Hockey Club runs 3 teams, all female. The Wellcome Hockey Club (Dartford) joined with Gravesham Hockey Club in summer 2015 and no longer exists as a separate club. They play and train at Gravesend Rugby Club's facilities outside the Borough. This indicates that the needs of Dartford's hockey playing population may be being met by clubs in Gravesend and Bexley. Local data indicates that average squad size is around 16-18.
- 7.34 Participation rates for hockey taken from the latest Active People Survey are 0.31% for England and 0.46% for the South East. For those participating in hockey at least once a week this rate drops to 0.2% and 0.31% respectively. There is no discernible trend in hockey participation over the previous 10 years, and rates have traditionally hovered between 0.3% and 0.5% in the South East, as illustrated in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Hockey Participation Rates



7.35 Taking into account the current South East participation rate of 0.46%, and Dartford’s most recent population estimates<sup>8</sup>, it can be deduced that there may be around 481 potential hockey players in the Borough currently (2015). Projecting forward to 2026, the expected population profile of the Borough indicates a potential pool of players of approximately 618, based on the same participation levels.

7.36 There is no reliable national data in terms of average player availability levels for hockey. Again, as hockey is a winter sport, players may be more regularly available than cricketers, for similar reasons to rugby. If we assume that 40 of every 100 players are regularly available to play club hockey, this would equate to around 192 players and around 11 teams currently, based on a squad size of 18. Although this does not appear to tally with existing local club data, it can be assumed that the needs of the Dartford pool of players are being met by clubs in Bexley and Gravesham boroughs. Projecting forward to 2026 and using the same assumptions, the pool of available players rises to 247, which equates to around 14 teams.

<sup>8</sup> KCC Population Forecasts, 2014

## 8. Current & Future Pitch Requirements

- 8.1 The preceding section outlines the levels of current demand for pitches for each sport in terms of the current number of formal teams in the Borough. This has then been projected forward using the anticipated levels of population growth in the Borough and assuming that participation rates and team structures will remain the same. This gives an approximation of the number of players for each sport and therefore the likely number of formal teams that will require a playing pitch in 2026.
- 8.2 It is important to assess the supply of pitches in the context of temporal demand, i.e. the time when pitches are most likely to be needed by clubs. The 2006 Study used Sport England's Playing Pitch Model to calculate the relative supply and demand for playing pitches in Dartford, both in 2005 and projected forward to 2011. The Model looks at the current supply of pitches compared with the temporal demand from local teams and identifies the surplus/deficit of pitches within the Borough. The calculated surplus/deficit of pitches is based upon the peak time of demand for pitches for each sport at the weekend and mid-week. This model only takes account of grass pitches and not Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs), which may be used for a variety of sports.

### ***Demand for pitches 2015***

- 8.3 Using the demand assumptions of the 2006 Study, in terms of both the number of home/training games per week, as well as temporal demand statistics, we can establish the current likely situation in terms of a surplus/deficit of pitches for the four main pitch-based sports using the team data identified above.

**Table 6: Playing Pitch Model Calculations 2015**

Stages of PPM		Teams/ Pitches	Football	Mini- Soccer	Cricket	Rugby Union	Hockey	
STAGE ONE Identifying Teams		Adult Teams	70	100	21	6	3	
		Junior Teams	112		18	6	-	
STAGE TWO Calculate home/training games per week		Adult Teams	0.4	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.5	
		Junior Teams	0.7		0.4	0.3	-	
STAGE THREE (S1 x S2) Assessing total home/training games per week		Adult Teams	28	70	11	1.8	1.5	
		Junior Teams	78		7	1.8	-	
STAGE FOUR Establish temporal demand for pitches		Saturday	Adult Teams	27% (PM)	17% (AM)	43% (PM)	100% (PM)	67% (PM)
			Junior Teams	10% (AM)		10% (AM)	-	-
		Sunday	Adult Teams	59% (AM)	38% (AM)	43% (PM)	-	-
			Junior Teams	44% (PM)		20% (AM)	100% (AM)	-
		Midweek	Adult Teams	1% (PM)	8% (PM)	7% (PM)	-	-
			Junior Teams	5% (PM)		20% (PM)	-	-
STAGE FIVE (S3 x S4) Defining pitches used each day		Saturday	Adult Teams	7.6	11.9	4.7	1.8	1.1
			Junior Teams	7.8		0.7	-	-
		Sunday	Adult Teams	16.5	26.6	4.7	-	-
			Junior Teams	34.3		1.4	1.8	-
		Midweek	Adult Teams	0.3	5.6	0.8	-	-
			Junior Teams	3.9		1.4	-	-
STAGE SIX Establishing pitches currently available		Adult Pitches	33	10	11	4	3 (AGP)	
		Junior Pitches	15		-	1	-	
STAGE SEVEN (S6-S5) Identifying shortfall (-) or surplus (+)		Saturday	Adult Pitches	25.4	-1.9	6.3	2.2	1.9
			Junior Pitches	7.2		10.3	-	-
		Sunday	Adult Pitches	16.5	-16.6	6.3	-	-
			Junior Pitches	-19.3		9.6	-0.8	-
		Midweek	Adult Pitches	32.7	4.4	10.2	-	-
			Junior Pitches	11.1		9.6	-	-

*Cricket*

8.4 The peak demand for cricket pitches is Saturday and Sunday afternoons for senior use. There is a surplus of 6.3 pitches available at this time. The peak demand for pitches for junior use is Saturday and Sunday mornings. There is a surplus of 10.3 and 9.6 pitches at these times respectively.

*Football*

- 8.5 The peak demand for adult football pitches is Sunday morning. There is a surplus of 16.5 pitches available at this time. The peak demand for junior pitches is Sunday afternoon. There is a deficit of 19.3 pitches at this time. The peak demand for mini soccer pitches is Sunday morning. There is a deficit of 16.6 pitches at this time. There is also a deficit of 1.9 mini soccer pitches on a Saturday morning.
- 8.6 These pitch deficits must be caveated by the fact that there are also 18 AGPs available to the community. All these pitches meet the minimum size for mini soccer games, therefore there is effectively a surplus of 1.4 mini soccer pitches available at peak time. 4 of the available AGPs also meet the minimum size requirements for junior pitches for 7v7 or 9v9 football. This brings the deficit down to 15.3 at peak time. Given that there is also a surplus of 16.5 senior pitches at this time, it is considered that the shortfall in junior pitches could be addressed by the availability of other football pitches at peak time.

*Rugby Union*

- 8.7 The peak demand for rugby union pitches is Saturday afternoon for senior pitches, and Sunday morning for junior pitches. There is a surplus of 2.2 senior pitches at the time of peak demand. There is a deficit of 0.8 junior pitches at the time of peak demand; however, there are 4 senior pitches available at this time for use by junior teams, which would lead to a surplus of 3.2 pitches.

*Hockey*

- 8.8 There are 2 grass pitches available for hockey; however, given that playing and training occurs almost exclusively on AGPs, these have been discounted from the model. 4 of the Borough's AGPs are large enough to accommodate full-sized hockey pitches, 3 of which are available to the community at the time of peak demand. Consequently, a figure of 3 has been used in the model.
- 8.9 The peak demand for hockey pitches is Saturday afternoon. There is a surplus of 1.9 pitches available at this time.

***Demand for pitches 2026***

- 8.10 Using the same demand assumptions we can project the likely surplus/deficit of pitches for the four main pitch-based sports for 2026 using the team data identified above.

**Table 7: Playing Pitch Model Calculations 2026**

Stages of PPM		Teams/ Pitches	Football	Mini- Soccer	Cricket	Rugby Union	Hockey
STAGE ONE Identifying Teams	Adult Teams	82	135	25	8	3.8	
	Junior Teams	152					
STAGE TWO Calculate home/training games per week	Adult Teams	0.4	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.5	
	Junior Teams	0.7					
STAGE THREE (S1 x S2) Assessing total home/training games per week	Adult Teams	32.8	94.5	12.5	2.4	1.9	
	Junior Teams	106.4					
STAGE FOUR Establish temporal demand for pitches	Saturday	Adult Teams	27% (PM)	17% (AM)	43% (PM)	100% (PM)	67% (PM)
		Junior Teams	10% (AM)		10% (AM)	-	-
	Sunday	Adult Teams	59% (AM)	38% (AM)	43% (PM)	-	-
		Junior Teams	44% (PM)		20% (AM)	100% (AM)	-
	Midweek	Adult Teams	1% (PM)	8% (PM)	7% (PM)	-	-
		Junior Teams	5% (PM)		20% (PM)	-	-
STAGE FIVE (S3 x S4) Defining pitches used each day	Saturday	Adult Teams	8.9	16.1	5.4	2.4	1.3
		Junior Teams	10.6		0.9	-	-
	Sunday	Adult Teams	19.4	35.9	5.4	-	-
		Junior Teams	46.8		1.7	2.4	-
	Midweek	Adult Teams	0.3	7.6	0.9	-	-
		Junior Teams	5.3		1.7	-	-
STAGE SIX Establishing pitches currently available	Adult Pitches	33	10	11	4	3 (AGP)	
	Junior Pitches	15					
STAGE SEVEN (S6-S5) Identifying shortfall (-) or surplus (+)	Saturday	Adult Pitches	24.1	-6.1	5.6	1.6	1.7
		Junior Pitches	4.4		10.1	-	-
	Sunday	Adult Pitches	13.6	-25.9	5.6	-	-
		Junior Pitches	-31.8		9.3	-1.4	-
	Midweek	Adult Pitches	32.7	2.4	10.1	-	-
		Junior Pitches	9.7		9.3	-	-

*Cricket*

8.11 There remains a surplus of 5.6 pitches at the time of peak demand for senior pitches in 2026. The ratio of senior to junior teams from the 2015 figures has been maintained, giving 21.4 junior teams by 2026. This translates into a surplus of 9.3 pitches at the time of peak demand for junior pitches.

### *Football*

- 8.12 There remains a surplus of 13.6 senior football pitches at the time of peak demand in 2026. There is also a surplus of 24.1 senior pitches on Saturday afternoons. The deficit in junior pitches has increased to 31.8 at the time of peak demand. Including the 4 AGPs available at this time that meet the minimum dimensions for 7v7 and 9v9 football, the deficit reduces to 27.8 pitches. There remains a surplus of senior pitches at this time that could alleviate the deficit in junior pitch provision. There is a deficit of 25.9 mini soccer pitches at the time of peak demand. There is also a deficit of 6.1 mini soccer pitches on Saturday mornings. The peak time deficit reduces to 7.9 pitches when the 18 AGPs that are available are taken into account, and the Saturday morning deficit is converted to a surplus of 11.9 pitches.

### *Rugby Union*

- 8.13 There is a surplus of 1.6 senior rugby union pitches at the time of peak demand in 2026. There is a deficit of 1.4 junior pitches at the time of peak demand; however, when available senior pitches are considered, this deficit is converted to a surplus of 2.6 pitches.

### *Hockey*

- 8.14 The projected growth in hockey teams identified earlier in the study has been tempered by local data and the projected rate of growth has been applied to the existing teams in 2015. This gives a total of 3.8 teams in 2026. This leads to a surplus of 1.7 pitches at the time of peak demand in 2026.

## **9. Conclusions & Recommendations**

- 9.1 The major developments currently ongoing and planned for within the Borough will lead to an increase in population and by extension an increased demand for sporting facilities. As demonstrated through this study, this will affect some sports more than others. Although many new pitch facilities are committed to through Section 106 agreements and in principle at development sites, these have not been taken into account in the calculations within this study, which has focussed exclusively on existing pitches and likely future demand. The final details of many of these facilities are still to be agreed, and could be subject to changes; it is therefore important that they cater for the likely increased demand for certain sports.
- 9.2 As indicated by Active People Survey participation figures, there has been a general decline in participation for all the major sports requiring formal playing pitches since 2006. This is unlikely to be down to a lack of facilities in Dartford, as there has been a steady increase in provision of new and refurbished facilities since 2006, as documented above. It is more likely that wider economic factors such as the recent recessions and subsequent wage stagnation have contributed to the overall decline in sports participation, as the pattern is replicated across the South East and nationally. However, some sports such as Rugby Union and Hockey have increased their participation levels in the last year, especially in the South East, so participation levels may begin to recover over time.

- 9.3 Although participation rates have declined in general terms, the demand for playing pitches in Dartford remains, and is expected to grow considering the projected increase in population as a result of the major developments currently being delivered in the Borough. The quantity of pitches will therefore need to increase and the quality of existing pitches maintained and improved where possible. The study has assumed that the level of participation for each of the major sports will not decline further, as improving participation levels is part of wider strategy for sport for the Council, Sport England and each sport's governing body.

#### ***Supply of pitches***

- 9.4 There are currently 145 playing pitches in the Borough. 25 new pitches have been provided since 2006.
- 9.5 Of the total pitches, currently 105 are available for community use, 18 of which are Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs). This is an improvement on the situation in 2006, where there were 84 pitches available for community use, with no AGPs available.

#### ***Pitch quality***

- 9.6 Sport England's data on the Borough's current playing pitches shows that 7 of them do not meet the Active Places criteria, i.e. they are not of sufficient size to meet the minimum standard necessary to be considered in the definition of an operable pitch. 5 of these pitches are local authority owned. Although it is likely that these pitches are and will continue to be used for training and informal recreation, they are not currently able to host official games.
- 9.7 It will therefore be important to ensure that any new pitches provided are capable of hosting official matches by meeting the minimum size criteria. It is also recommended that the Council seek to rectify those pitches that do not meet the Active Places criteria that are in its ownership.
- 9.8 The survey of pitch quality among sports clubs found that pitches were deemed of a good or acceptable overall quality; however, ancillary facilities such as parking and changing facilities were more variable, with some described as poor. This rise in quality from 2006 is likely due to the number of new and refurbished pitches provided during this period. It will therefore be important to ensure that new pitch provision is supported by ancillary facilities of an appropriate size and quality.

#### ***Current and future demand for pitches***

##### *Cricket*

- 9.9 The updated Playing Pitch Model (PPM) shows that there is currently a surplus of 6.3 pitches at the time of peak demand for senior use. The projected increase in demand to 2026 shows that there remains a surplus of 5.6 pitches. There are greater surpluses for junior teams. This means that the existing cricket pitches will be able to cope with the increased demand in future.

### *Football*

- 9.10 The PPM shows that there is currently a surplus of 16.5 pitches for senior use at the time of peak demand. There is a deficit of 15.3 junior pitches at the time of peak demand. There is a surplus of 1.4 mini soccer pitches at the time of peak demand. It is considered that the availability of senior pitches may be meeting the demand for junior football at peak times; however, this is not an ideal situation.
- 9.11 Projecting forward to 2026, there remains a surplus of 13.6 senior football pitches at the time of peak demand. The deficit in junior pitches is projected to increase to 27.8 at the time of peak demand. Again, the availability of senior pitches at this time will go some way to addressing this pitch deficit. There is also a projected deficit of 7.9 mini soccer pitches at the time of peak demand.
- 9.12 It is therefore clear that the provision of junior football and mini soccer facilities will need to be addressed through future planned development. The deficit in junior football and mini soccer could also be alleviated through increasing community access to the number of pitches owned by education providers where possible. The following recommendations are therefore made:
- Investigate the potential to secure further agreements with education providers to hire pitches for community use to address the projected deficits in junior football and mini soccer pitch provision.
  - Seek to improve the quality of existing junior football and mini soccer provision in order to meet Active Places criteria, where possible.
  - Ensure that new pitch provision meets minimum size and quality guidelines to meet Active Places criteria.
  - Ensure that provision of new AGPs include those of sufficient size for all forms of junior football to be played, or are able to accommodate multiple formats.

### *Rugby Union*

- 9.13 There is currently a surplus of 2.2 senior pitches at the time of peak demand. There is currently a deficit of 0.8 junior pitches at the time of peak demand, currently alleviated by the availability of senior pitches. Projecting forward to 2026, there remains a surplus of 1.6 senior pitches at the time of peak demand. The deficit in junior pitches at the time of peak demand rises to 1.4 pitches, although this can still be met by the availability of senior pitches at this time.
- 9.14 Therefore, there are sufficient senior pitches to meet demand both now and in future; however, specialist junior facilities are required to satisfactorily address present and future demand.

*Hockey*

- 9.15 There is currently a surplus of 1.9 hockey pitches at the time of peak demand. Projecting forward to 2026, there remains a surplus of 1.7 pitches at the time of peak demand.
- 9.16 This pitch surplus may not be fully reflective of a suppressed level of demand for hockey pitches in the Borough due to the lack of available teams/clubs. It is likely that the needs of Dartford residents will continue to be served by clubs in adjoining Boroughs in the short-medium term. Longer term there may be a higher level of pitch demand should new clubs/teams form within the Borough.

***Overall summary and policy recommendations***

- 9.17 This study has shown that there remains a demand for formal playing pitches in the Borough and that this level of demand is set to increase across all sports in correlation with the expected increases in Dartford's population due to development currently taking place or planned for in the Borough. The majority of the main pitch-based sports will be able to cope with this increase in demand at peak times, with a surplus of pitches still available in 2026; however, these surpluses could easily be lost if playing pitches were lost to other uses, or if participation levels increase over time. It is therefore appropriate that the Council continues to protect against the loss of playing pitches to ensure appropriate facilities are available to meet increased levels of demand.
- 9.18 The Council has a good track record of investing in qualitative improvements to existing sports facilities in recent years and this should be continued in order to ensure that as many as possible of the publicly owned pitches in the Borough meet Active Places criteria and are of sufficient quality to be used for formal competition.
- 9.19 Planned for development and the associated commitments through Section 106 agreements for playing pitch provision will go some way to addressing the continued shortfall in junior football and mini soccer pitch provision. It will be important for the Council to ensure that these commitments are fully delivered wherever possible. The Council should continue to encourage the provision of multi-use facilities of the appropriate size and quality to address the shortfalls in football provision. The delivery of Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) available for community use will be important in achieving this.