

Progress achieved by 1st December 2008 with the Horspath Village Sports Association Site Development Plan

This is solely a summary of the progress achieved in producing a Site Development Plan for the Horspath Village Sports Association (HVSA), and it will not therefore include a full record of all the various personal initiatives, generous donations, contributions in kind, fund-raising, and volunteer work of all kinds which has contributed to the successful establishment of the Association during the past four years. The focus of this document is only on the technical, Planning, funding and community aspects of the HVSA Site Development Plan.

One of the main reasons for forming the Horspath Village Sports Association was to enable all the people in the village, regardless of age and gender, who have an interest in playing sport, to benefit from access to some improved sports and recreation facilities to be established on the land already owned by Horspath Parish Council. By combining together the strength of the existing individual sports clubs in the village, new opportunities are opened up for receiving major grant funding from sources approved by Sport England, including the Lottery. However, in order to meet all the requirements for receiving any grants for major sports projects approved by Sport England, a series of closely specified preliminary actions are required.

Firstly, Sport England requires that the new sports facilities requested are not only supported by a majority of the local people who will use them, and that they will be accessible by all members of the community, but also that there is an actual need for these facilities in a particular area because of an existing under-provision in the area of the particular sports facilities requested. This has involved the Horspath Sports Association (HVSA) in four years of investigation, external consultation, and market research and testing, which is summarised here.

In 2004-2005 the HVSA launched a poster campaign to invite suggestions about developing new sports facilities in the village from anyone living or playing sport in Horspath. The poster was also sent to every household, and two public meetings were held to discuss the suggestions. Although one or two people wanted undeliverable items, such as a village swimming pool, 4 very clear priorities emerged from this consultation:

- 1. To improve sports facilities generally for children from families living n Horspath.**
- 2. To construct a second cricket pitch to allow the Horspath Cricket Club to play more matches at home.**
- 3. To construct 2 fully drained FA 11-a-side football pitches so that football could be played regularly in the village, rather than on rented pitches outside the village.**
- 4. To construct some village tennis courts.**

In 2006-2007 the HVSA took the results of the first public consultations to South Oxford District Council (SODC) to gain the advice and support of the **SODC Sports Development Officer**, because Sport England would judge any development plans against the local need identified, not only by the relevant national sporting bodies, such as the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), the England Cricket Board (ECB), and the Football Association (FA), but also according to the Local Authority's perception of the local need for additional facilities. The SODC Sports Development Officer was very helpful and supportive, and after a site meeting, she endorsed the basic 4 priorities HVSA which had emerged from the initial public consultation, and recommended that the HVSA should develop a site plan on the basis of some specialist advice to be provided by the LTA, ECB, FA, and the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association. She also emphasised that the HVSA's view of sport as including sport and all kinds of physical recreation was in agreement with current strategic sports and health planning at a national level. She recommended that the HVSA should develop its Plan as single integrated plan to include all aspects of sport and physical recreation in this community, and she particularly liked the creation of the '**Green Mile**' walking and running route around the Parish Council land. She also advised that an evaluation of the actual need for improved sports facilities would be undertaken by SODC throughout its wards, and that Horspath as a village should try to quantify the popular support amongst residents for the different elements of the HVSA Plan.

Site meetings were then arranged in 2006-2007 for the HVSA to consult all four of these bodies recommended by the SODC Sports Development Officer, and to gain their technical advice on the Site Plan and solicit their approval for the HVSA sports development plan to go forward for grant funding. The HVSA learned a great deal about sports funding during these consultations, but only some of the most important conclusions can be listed very briefly here:

1. **The Development Officer for the ECB in Oxfordshire was very supportive** of the plan for the 2nd cricket ground with a 70-metre boundary, not only on the basis of the HCC's current needs, but in anticipation of the Club's progression. There appeared to be no immediate prospect of grant funding from the ECB for the new ground, but he assured us of the ECB's support. He made us aware of the changing room requirements for cricket, exceeding those for football in terms of space, which would be acceptable to Sport England. It was confirmed that the existence of two other cricket grounds nearby would not detract from Horspath's own bid for development support, as these other grounds catered for different needs and areas, and indeed the proximity of 3 or 4 cricket grounds relatively close together could at some future date make Horspath an attractive venue for hosting a major cricket tournament.
2. **The Development Officer for the Oxfordshire FA was very supportive**, and confirmed that the HVSA Site Development Plan, with its efficient dual sports usage of the area of land which would require the installation of field drainage, with 2 FA pitches marked out over the cricket outfield in the winter season, would meet the requirements of the FA and of Sport England, provided that all the changing room facilities were also equal to or above Sport England's requirements. He confirmed that there would be no Football Foundation funding available for football on this site unless the pitches were to be fully drained. He suggested that subject to meeting all the technical requirements, the Football Foundation would most likely be able to contribute 50% of the total cost of the new sports ground and pavilion with new changing rooms for four 15-person teams and all other required facilities. He considered that the Football Foundation grant might also be conditional upon the Horspath football clubs undertaking to seek FA Charter status, and in particular to provide for a natural progression of children from local schools through the junior teams and on to the senior teams. It was noted that there were no women's football teams in this part of South Oxfordshire, and he proposed that the development of girls and women's football in Horspath would meet the needs of a wider area, and would therefore be more likely to attract funding, and even sponsorship.
3. **The Lawn Tennis Association was also supportive** of the HVSA plan to add tennis courts to the mix of sports facilities, but noted that with about 15 tennis courts in the Wheatley Ward, people in Horspath might not be considered disadvantaged in their access to courts. The LTA advised that for public use, a grass court requires intensive maintenance, and that hard courts would be the only sensible option. The LTA would not consider funding any hard courts which were part of a 'multi-sport' all weather playing surface, although it would in principle support such a development. The proposal for two hard courts, one exclusively for tennis, and one shared with other sports was considered, but this needed to be tested for its popularity by means of more market research.
4. **The Development Officer of the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association, who already knows Horspath well, enthusiastically supported the HVSA Site Plan** after a site visit, and he recommended that to be considered sustainable into the future, a project of this size must initially have a contracted 'Project Manager' to oversee every aspect of the implementation of the Plan, and within the Business Plan which Sport England will require, there must be provision for the employment of maintenance staff for the large number of pitches and the new sports pavilion/clubhouse. He said that Sport England would also be very concerned to know about the security of tenure of the HVSA over any new sports pitches, and any new pavilion/clubhouse, and that Local Planning Permissions should be sought from SODC. He estimated the cost of the whole HVSA Plan would be £1.4 - £1.6 millions at 2006 values.

With all these new factors to consider, the HVSA returned to SODC for seek further advice on strategy, funding, Planning Permission, and any more detailed project research which would be required.

The Sports Development Officer was very satisfied with the feedback received from the ECB, FA, and OPFA, and advised a pre-Application site meeting with a senior SODC Planning Officer. The Planning Officer advised that there would be no need to make a Planning Application for a ‘change of use’ for any of the grass pitches because part of the ground had already been the Salesian College Sports Field before the Parish Council bought it, but that building work or the construction of any new buildings would not be permitted on any part of the site, which is entirely within the Green Belt, controlled by government Planning Policy Guidelines 2 (PPG2). It was pointed out to the Planning Officer that the only existing building on the site which could possibly be converted to sports usage, the old Scout Hut, was too small to contain all the changing and other facilities required by Sport England to support the proposed number of sports pitches. The Planning Officer therefore proposed that the HVSA should consider designing a new pavilion/clubhouse with a much lower roofline than the Scout Hut, so that it could be considered as a **‘replacement building’**, but with a larger floor area to meet the requirements of Sport England to include four 15-place team changing rooms with separate showers and WCs, a referee’s/umpire’s room, a First Aid Room, secure store, a small kitchen and a clubroom for sportspeople, parents, and spectators to use. Such a larger building could be made more attractive to the Local Planning Authority if it was also designed to be “highly energy-efficient, with generally reduced environmental impact”. The Planning Authority would also need to be satisfied in a Planning Application that the harvesting of surface rainwater into an underground tank would enable the cricket grounds to be irrigated in any dry weather without putting any demand on the piped Thames Water supply. The Parish Council and HVSA were advised to seek the advice of the **SODC Forestry Officer** and the **SODC Countryside Officer**, to obtain an evaluation of the line of trees which would need to be moved or removed for the new cricket/football field, and to obtain advice on the best ways to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the whole site in compensation for the removal of these trees.

In late 2006 Horspath Parish Council and the HVSA therefore commissioned an energy efficiency survey of the site and of the HVSA Site Plan from TV Energy. This technical report indicated that it would be possible to make the proposed replacement building – the new sports pavilion/clubhouse – very highly energy efficient, by using a ground source heat pump, solar panels, photovoltaic panels, and a wind turbine. Such a building would be the first of its kind in the area, and as a “flagship project”, it might attract grant funding from different sources.

The SODC Forestry Officer visited the HVSA site to assess the value of the line of trees which would need to be moved or removed to provide the open space for the proposed new cricket/football field. He identified only 3 trees of high conservation value, recommending that even for these, it would be more reliable to plant new ones rather than to attempt to move them and replant them. He advised planting many more trees than the number which would be removed, to create a new strip of continuous woodland on the western edge of the proposed new sports field, and to fill in any gaps in the existing hedge lines around the rest of the Bowley (Salesian) Field.

The SODC Countryside Officer was consulted about the emerging plan to remove the line of trees, and recommended that the new trees should be planted before the removal of the old ones. He recommended that the west part of the Bowley (Salesian) Field should be left as a grass meadow for informal public recreation and nature conservation, with one annual cut of the grass each autumn, and that the grass along all the margins of the field should be allowed to grow up to enhance biodiversity. On the basis of a tree planting plan supplied by the Parish Council to SODC, the District Council agreed to supply new trees, stakes and wind shields free of charge.

The HVSA Site Plan, as agreed by the HVSA Committee, was presented for approval to the **Horspath Village Hall Management Committee (HVMC)**, the separate charity which controls the usage of all the village assets, including the land, at the Village Hall site. It was also published in the Horspath Parish Council Newsletter, inviting comments, and delivered to every household in Horspath. **With the approval of the HVMC, the HVSA presented the HVSA Site Plan to the Parish Council, which approved it for implementation.**

Volunteers planted **120 trees** supplied by SODC in the Bowley (Salesian) Field in the winter of 2006/2007, followed by a **further 300 new trees** received from SODC in the winter of 2007/2008. Most of the old tree line was removed by volunteers in the winter of 2007/2008 to enable the full width of the new sports field to be mown by volunteers in the summer of 2008, using the Parish Council's tractor and mower, and the Cricket Club's gang mower, and generously loaned tractors and mowers. **A further 100 trees** were ordered for planting in 2008/2009.

In April 2008 SODC published its long-delayed report on "Open space, sport, and recreational facility assessment" - which in spite of some inaccuracies, seemed to suggest that the Wheatley Ward (in which Horspath is included) is not especially under-provided with sports facilities. This is not a factor in determining the choice of priorities by Horspath residents for the development of sports facilities in Horspath, but it may be a factor affecting the availability of local and regional government funding to achieve those priorities.

In June 2008, in order to accurately assess the need for a field drainage system in the proposed new cricket/football sports field, the HVSA commissioned a survey and report on this from Alan Penn, the Fields in Trust / National Playing Fields Association Technical Manager, with the remit that he should not only advise on the need, but recommend the specific type of field drainage required on the type of soil on this site. The Report confirmed that a primary and secondary sports field drainage system would need to be an essential part of any HVSA Plan, if any grant funding from the Football Foundation or Sport England was to be sought to develop the use of this land for winter football. This Report also made clear that regular professional pitch and pavilion/clubhouse facilities maintenance would also be necessary.

In the summer of 2008 the Horspath Parish Plan Steering Group, and many additional volunteers, conducted a household survey of Horspath residents' opinions and priorities, using a Questionnaire professionally designed by SODC, which included a section intended to produce the quantitative evidence of the level of support for the HVSA Plan recommended by the SODC Sports Development Officer. The statistical results of the Questionnaire provided the necessary and encouraging quantitative evidence of very strong public support for all the main elements of the HVSA Plan, and these can be summarised:

Of the 84% of all Horspath households who responded by completing the Parish Plan Questionnaire:

81.4% supported the HVSA Plan for the expansion of sports and recreation facilities

80.5% supported the development of an all-weather multi-sport area, particularly for young people

77.9% supported the construction of two hard tennis courts for use by Horspath residents

70.2% supported the development of two grass football pitches

63.0% supported the development of the second cricket pitch

while

92.5% also strongly supported the defence of the Green Belt against building development and

90.9% also considered it very important to be able to see a variety of wildlife in the village

On the basis of this **clear evidence of strong majority support for all the main elements of the HVSA Plan**, Horspath Parish Council gave the HVSA permission to establish the precise position of the 2nd cricket square, so that the Cricket Club could start raising its own funding to implement this, with the proviso that the new cricket field should be located to leave the maximum number of options open for developing other new sports facilities on the site as funding becomes available. **The HVSA Site Plan was therefore revised in September 2008 to show a few small changes made to the pitch layout to reflect these decisions and provide for more options.**

Whereas the 2008 SODC survey of sports facilities was produced against the background strategy of Sport England for the period 2004-2008, **Sport England has now published new national and regional sports strategies for 2008-2011**, which will have a different impact on the prospects for the HVSA Plan to receive

funding. The details of the new strategies are set out in comprehensive documents available online through the website www.sportengland.org/index but some of the changes are very significant, and can be summarised here:

- There is increased emphasis on developing sports opportunities for Women and Girls, the over 45s, Young People, Persons with Disabilities and BME Groups, with encouragement given to applicants for grants from wards listed in the top 20% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Multiple uses for facilities are to be prioritised.
- There is increased emphasis on increasing the fitness of people over 45 years old by physical recreation.
- The security of tenure of sports fields for a minimum of 21 years, the legal status of sports clubs applying for grants, and the environmental impact of any proposed sports development schemes will be fully examined.
- Evidence of an active child protection policy is required in clubs seeking grants, and they will be encouraged to work towards good practice accreditation such as Clubmark, Quest, and Investors in People.
- There is increased emphasis on developing community sporting links with schools, developing sport in education, and through local sports partnerships, with coaching and volunteering linked to national strategies.
- Given the adverse influence of the economic recession, and the pressure of funding the Olympics from the Lottery, there is now a greater emphasis on funding sports initiatives which demand only a 35% contribution from Sport England. It is unlikely that any request for a single grant award over £400,000, or for less than £50,000 will be funded by Sport England, or that any project which has already been funded, will be awarded further grants.
- There are to be no further Community Investment Fund grants for sport after 2008. Funds will be allocated to the regions, in our case, the South East Regional Sports Board, to be advised by the National Governing Bodies, according to the aims set out in “*Framework for Sport*” and “*Mission Possible, the South East Plan for Sport*”.
- Sport England will not fund football projects in future, which will be funded by the Football Foundation. ‘By placing football at the heart of multi-sport facilities, football also has the potential to support growth in a range of sports.’ (Direct quotation from paragraph 75, Sport England national strategy 2008-2011.)

Horspath Village Sports Association now has a clear mandate from village residents to develop improved sports and recreation facilities, and it also has a viable Site Plan, which establishes a framework for development, but the sports priorities for national and regional grant funding have changed since the project was started four years ago. In the process of gaining credibility for a major sports development, in which any grant funding from Sport England or the Football Foundation will need to be more than matched by other funding, it is more efficient to seek funding for a large project than for a series of small ones. However, if very large single grants are now unlikely to be made, it may be more strategic to continue to seek funding for individual elements of the HVSA Plan, on the basis of several factors:

- The numbers of volunteers prepared to contribute in kind to any particular element of the HVSA Plan.
- The local and regional priority given to any particular element of the HVSA Plan.
- The availability of specific commercial sponsorship for any element of the HVSA Plan.
- The increased viability of any element of the HVSA Plan if its development can be based upon the need for such specific sports facilities in a wider catchment area than just for Horspath village alone.
- The way in which several local, regional and national priorities for sports development might all be met at the same time in the realisation of any single element of the HVSA Plan, to attract more funding.

The next stage in the development of improved sports facilities in Horspath will be for the membership of the HVSA to agree its priorities in general, and to agree its priority action for the coming year, in order to respond to the expressed priorities of village residents, and use village resources in the most efficient way.