

Proposal: 2013 Regional Sports Field Strategy Review

Introduction

In 2013 the Wellington Region Sports Field Strategy (the Strategy) was published. The Strategy was developed to inform decisions on winter sports field provision. The study used the 'Sports Field Model' to provide evidence to support the demand for field space and a basis for establishing capacity increase requirements. It provided information to identify both the size and location where increased capacity would best meet current or future shortfall in supply. The study included Kapiti Coast, Upper Hutt, Porirua, Hutt City and Wellington City.

The focus of the report was on:

- Determining demand (in 2012), matching demand with supply, identifying where there were supply surpluses and shortfalls and whether shortfalls could be readily accommodated by surplus supply in neighbouring areas
- Using population growth, participation rates, popularity of different codes and sport development plans to project future demand, matching this demand with planned future supply, and identifying where there are likely to be supply surpluses and shortfall
- Providing information on which to base decisions on how best to provide future supply
- Providing information to optimise the timing and funding allocation that will be required to meet future demand

Key outcomes were identified by Territorial Authority Area (TA) with options proposed for future supply. Investment programmes were also listed for each TA.

Examples of the outcome of this work are the successful delivery of field upgrade projects such as the Terawhiti Wilf Glover artificial turf in Wellington. The strategy also highlighted future demand shortfalls for floodlit training hours.

What is being proposed?

To facilitate changes that are likely to impact sports field provision planning we are proposing to review the 2103 strategy with a view to updating the plan to factor in changes in our operating environment since 2013.

An updated Regional Sports Field Plan will help the various TAs to consider how to respond to specific pressures, such as population growth for example. Wellington City has specific issues around the scarcity of flat space, Porirua has a significant field facility in an area where sea level rise and inundation will need to be managed in the long term and there are seasonal water shortages in the Wairarapa and Kapiti Coast.

A regional plan will set the scene for more detailed planning at a local level while providing guidance on the issues that are part of field planning and management across the region. This will allow for integrated planning, add strength to decision making, and provide efficiency in that each Council can direct their focus on very specific issues in their area.

The value of a regional sports field plan

The Wellington Region has a good foundation for working regionally to deliver a fit-for-purpose network of sports fields. The sport, recreation and play landscape is a rapidly changing one and up-to-date regional analysis and direction will be critical to keeping pace with demands for space, to maximise use, continuing to address historical inequities in allocation or provision over time and to make well informed, evidenced based investment decisions.

Alongside the provision of the fields and associated facilities sit the policies and processes around allocation of these spaces. The nature of sports fields is that they occupy often large areas of land (usually Reserve land) and therefore there needs to be very clear articulation of the value of the fields in contributing to a broad range of city and community values from health and wellbeing right through to environmental and amenity value.

It is important to understand and regularly review carrying capacity of fields, expectations of users, quality and provision of space, changes in demand and allocation over time and management of peak and off-peak use.

Planning the network of fields must also align with Open Space planning more generally, to incorporate the other values associated with these spaces as informal park spaces for community use, amenity, and other ecosystem services such as providing permeable surfaces to manage storm water.

There is also a need to respond to national policy direction such as the new Sport New Zealand strategic plan *Every Body Active (2019)* and the role that the regional sports field network will play in delivery of key outcomes identified in that plan.

The Strategy will provide a regional overview while continuing to enable local decision making around investment, provision, and allocation.

Why a review?

A lot of things are changing or have already changed since the 2013 plan was developed.

Population growth

Across the region there is a focus on understanding how to meet the needs of a growing population. Porirua, Wellington, Kapiti, and Hutt City are experiencing rapid population growth. There is discussion around the proper provision of community facilities – including sports fields – as each TA plans for this growth. There is a need to carefully consider the investment required to meet need in the future and plan for this alongside all the other infrastructure required in new and changing local communities.

There is already a need for regional planning with formal sports being delivered and played across the region and delivered across multiple TA's. For example, children playing football will play across the field network in Hutt City, Wellington City, Upper Hutt, and Porirua.

Climate response and emergency management

Climate change and disaster management is also front of mind since the last sports field strategy was completed. The role of fields in immediate response to disaster is well understood since the earthquakes in Christchurch. The potential of fields to play a role in storm water management and understanding the carbon footprint of field development and management also need to be incorporated into planning and investment in fields. Water management and supply in the summer months is already an issue for Councils and will be further impacted by climate change.

Changing costs

Costs continue to rise significantly in the construction industry, and this impacts the delivery of sports field upgrade and development projects. Large parts of the Wellington network of fields are constructed on old landfills or 'left over' areas of old subdivision. These sites have complex ground conditions with limited options for improvement without significant investment. Ian Galloway Park in Wellington is a good example where large parts of the fields are un-useable due to slumping and shifting ground.

Technology changes

Keeping pace with technology advances in field construction, maintenance and management is also part of the solution to maximising investment and the range of outcomes associated with providing a range of natural and artificial field space. Understanding the need and opportunity for partnership with others who provide field space is also part of the regional planning context – in particular with schools.

Changing participation patterns and demand

Participation patterns are also changing which impacts participant numbers for a range of traditional sports (e.g. some participants only want to commit to say a 6-8 week programme, instead of joining a club). Codes are developing new versions of their sport to keep demand high and meet changing participant need and this may often lead to different sports field requirements.

There is greater emphasis on physical activity generally across all four of its domains – play, active recreation, active transport, and sport and this may require us to consider different uses and other physical activity opportunities on sports fields alongside sport. At the same time formal/structured use of sports fields faces increasing pressure from casual/informal users.

The Ministry of Education continues to have an expectation that Councils will fund fields for student use. Significant school development is proposed across the Wellington region in response to population growth planning. College Sport Wellington runs programmes across the sporting codes that rely on the delivery of the competition on both school and Council owned fields. This again requires coordinating and planning for field and facilities investment to meet their needs and respond to changing trends in participation and school and Ministry funding and development policy.

Regional Spaces and Places Plan

Since the development of the 2013 strategy, we have undertaken a large piece of work to develop the Regional Spaces and Places (Facilities) Plan. The plan sets out a vision for a one-region approach to spaces and places planning and the optimisation of the regional network. On the back of the data collected during the development of the strategy, Sport NZ has created a national database of facilities which individual councils can access and update as required. Sports field data is included in this.

Planning and investment requirements

All TA's need to prepare business cases for Long Term Plans and understand the long-term investment planning for the various assets that each manages. Investment in infrastructure is under significant pressure across the region so it will be important to include community infrastructure (such as sports fields) in the broader discussion around how to fund this infrastructure over time. Review of the strategy will provide the necessary evidence of need and outcomes associated with any investment proposals.

Finally, across the region there is ongoing pressure on Councils to provide higher quality fields and associated facilities for the various sports codes and clubs. Allocation of spaces to different user groups (e.g. professional sports) also remains a complex issue, particularly in the face of changing patterns of participation in sport.

How will we benefit from a review?

The review process will provide a foundation for thinking about the future and require regional stakeholders to:

- Understand the state of the existing network of fields – quantity and quality as well as usage and capacity

- Understand future demand, especially for non-traditional sports, informal sports, active recreation and play.
- Identify and agree any significant gaps in current field provision
- Identify the range of values associated with the current network (in general open space planning terms)
- Develop a sense of what the future state should look like, and the BROAD OUTCOMES associated with that future state. This will align with population growth and regional spatial planning.
- Identify current allocation policy and process and consider if that is aligned to above outcomes
- Prioritise key projects and outcomes over clearly defined timeframes
- Share knowledge and recent lessons learnt in relation to both sport and recreation participation and in development and management of fields
- Provide any relevant insights (recent project engagement, parks satisfaction surveys etc) around public opinion or sentiment in regard to sports field use and management.
- Consider integration of the school fields and other facilities and what this means to development of partnerships and meeting outcomes associated with the provision of the whole network of fields across the region.
- Identify any other key issues and opportunities for their area of the region

An updated plan will provide information that can be used to:

- create an up-to-date inventory of the existing network and hierarchy of fields across the different cities/districts including a high-level condition and current use information (already available in Spaces and Places inventory but worth verifying and/or expanding).
- consider demand for sports fields from a full range of formal and informal sport, recreation and play user groups and how to prioritise different uses and user groups.
- provide a strong evidence base for investment decisions both regionally and locally
- clearly articulate outcome and benefits associated with investment and alignment with national strategy and local strategy (i.e. Sport NZ Strategy and TA's strategic direction).
- ensure sports field provision at a local level aligns with the delivery of formal sport regionally.
- identify opportunities and outline process for consideration of partnership opportunities (in particular with schools).
- align with the new Regional Spaces and Places Plan in terms of supporting sound processes for investment decisions in facilities associated with the fields (such as sports hub development for example).
- make recommendations that will help to manage the growing pressure from sports or activities for access to some facilities and expectations of the level of service provided and high-quality facilities.
- identify the total number of premier facilities required across the region.
- identify opportunities for the use of leading-edge technology to maximise use and cost benefit associated with field upgrade or development.
- identify opportunities for full lifecycle costs to be reduced, including low carbon futures, water management and renewal and demolition cost/impact

