

Review of Grass Soccer Pitches Allocation Process

March 2016



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**Belfast City
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1. Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1** This is a review of Belfast City Council's approach to allocating grass soccer pitches; The review comes at a time of change in local government that the Council is embracing within a long-term strategic plan for the city, the Belfast Agenda, currently being developed. The Belfast Agenda is set to emphasise integrated delivery (of services) at a local level that is focused on outcomes and engages local people. In the allocation of pitches context, the outworking of the Belfast Agenda will see a mutually beneficial partnership arrangement with soccer to assist in delivering the Council's outcomes for the well-being of Belfast's citizens. Dialogue between the Council and soccer is essential to ensure the process for allocating pitches is shaped and delivered to best effect and to plan effectively for future provision, addressing issues such as management and site maintenance.
- 1.2** The Council makes available 66 of its grass soccer pitches to youth and adult soccer Leagues for the purpose of competitive play, usually on Saturdays during the playing season. The Council's brief for the review is to follow a staged approach:-

Stage 1a	Supply and demand analysis
Stage 1b	Appraisal of management Options
Stage 2	Recommendation of Option and process to be used for allocation

Methodology

- 1.3** The methodology is in two phases:-

Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- a survey of the Leagues which are allocated Council pitches currently.- a focus group meeting with the Leagues.- information on the usage of pitches gathered and analysed.- how 3G pitches are used for matches.- consultations with elected Members, Council officers, the IFA and other Councils.
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- the research and findings are presented.- a series of Options is identified and appraised.- a set of criteria relating to eligibility and allocations is put forward.

Context

1.4 Currently⁽¹⁾ there are ten soccer Leagues (four youth Leagues, six adult Leagues) to which the Council makes available its grass pitches. On Saturday mornings 66 pitches are allocated to youth Leagues and on Saturday afternoons 52 pitches are allocated to adult Leagues. Other key facts are:-

- ❖ The Belfast and District League has the largest allocation of the adult Leagues at 23 pitches; this League is wholly comprised of Belfast based teams.
- ❖ The South Belfast Youth League has the largest allocation of all Leagues at 44 pitches; approximately half of the League's teams are from outside Belfast. The League also uses pitches in neighbouring Council areas.
- ❖ During consultation it emerged one of the adult Leagues may fold at the end of the 2015/16 season.
- ❖ The six adult Leagues have a combined total of 362 registered teams of which 86 (24%) are reckoned to be Belfast based. The four youth Leagues have a total of 714 registered teams of which 410 (57%) are reckoned to be Belfast based.
- ❖ Five teams, playing in the Down Area Winter League, book pitches directly from the Council.

1.5 Pitch usage information was made available for 2014 and 2015 covering the four month period from September to December in each year. The analysis evidences significant under-use of the Leagues' allocations, both youth and adult. The overall picture is:-

	September – December 2014	September – December 2015
Average pitch usage across all Leagues and all Pitches	59%	36%

Survey / Consultation

1.6 Consultation with the Leagues (survey and focus group) was informative and largely positive. The Leagues are generally satisfied with the Council's present approach to

⁽¹⁾ 2015/2016 season.

allocating pitches to Leagues¹²¹. The youth Leagues are happy to continue to act on behalf of their teams as they feel this ensures pitches are booked and games played. Most of the adult Leagues are content with the present arrangements although the Northern Amateur Football League, whilst preferring not to have to book pitches, will continue to do so. The Down Area Winter League would like the historical arrangement for its five Belfast based teams to continue wherein these teams book pitches directly from the Council.

Options Analysis

- 1.7 Arising from research and consultation a series of seven Options relating to management of the pitches allocation process is put forward. The Options are also informed by a number of influences identified by the Council, ie, additional pitches and teams in the Council area as a result of Local Government Reform, competing requests for the same pitch, under-usage of allocated pitches and pitch requests from Leagues outside the area. Each Option is assessed and scored against four criterion. A summary of the final rankings from the highest to the lowest is:-

Rank	Option	
1	Option 4	Pitches allocated by Leagues through an agreed process.
2	Option 6	Pitches allocated to teams by an external organisation.
3	Option 5	Pitches allocated to teams by youth Leagues and adult clubs/teams through an agreed process.
4	Status Quo	The majority of pitches are allocated to teams by the Leagues; a small number of pitches are allocated by the Council.
5=	Option 2	Pitches allocated to teams by the Council on a lottery/luck of the draw basis.
5=	Option 3	Pitches allocated to teams by the Council through an agreed process.
7	Option 1	Pitches allocated to teams by the Council match by match on a first come first served basis.

¹²¹ Section 4 summarises the survey findings and the Leagues' focus group meeting, highlighting a number of operational issues.

Eligibility and Allocations Criteria

Level 1

- 1.8 With at least 10 leagues (2015) booking pitches the Council needs a way to assess applications from the Leagues at the start of each season. A series of assessment criteria and a weighted scoring matrix have been devised to assist the Council when considering requests. The criteria seeks to reflect the consultation undertaken with the Leagues during the review process; the criteria and weighting are as follows:-

Criterion	% Weighting
Recognised by the governing body	Yes/No to determine eligibility
Belfast based teams	50
Governance	25
Outstanding debt	15
Previous season's usage	10

Level 2

- 1.9 There is also a need to be able to manage requests from clubs/teams in relation to a range of scenarios including competing requests for a site/pitch, spare capacity, under-usage and incidences of displacement. Again a set of criteria and a weighted scoring matrix have been developed to assess such requests:-

Criterion	% Weighting
Home catchment	30
Clubmark	25
Outstanding debt	10
Sports/player pathway development	30
Previous pitch usage	5

Conclusions and Recommendations

- 1.10 The review concludes there is a need to revise the existing arrangements for allocating grass soccer pitches. The analysis of Options has resulted in a preferred Option which should be adopted. To be clear,

It is recommended that Option 4 is the preferred Option, that is, for the purposes of competitive matches the Council allocates grass pitches exclusively to Leagues in accordance with a set of criteria. The Leagues will then allocate the pitches to their registered clubs/teams.

1.11 A number of comments/suggestions relating to the Council's operation of the pitches have been made by consultees and are noted throughout the report. Several are highlighted:-

❖ **Un-used allocations**

Average usage of pitch allocations across all Leagues and all pitches was 59% in 2014 and 36% in 2015.⁽³⁾ This is an issue which should be investigated given there appears to be a situation of 'false' demand which could potentially skew any assessment of adequacy of provision of pitches. In the meantime, reasons for un-used allocations should be recorded, to assist in any investigation.

❖ **Pitch playability**

A cut-off time for cancellations needs to be established and adhered to – the Leagues suggest Friday lunch-time. Of course overnight weather may necessitate later cancellations. Presently there appears to be more than one approach to cancellations by the Council.

❖ **3G**

Some Leagues and some clubs already use 3G pitches – Council and other providers – for matches. All the Leagues endorse 3G pitches for matches and training although they don't all request 3G in their allocations. It is perhaps time to consider a strategic approach to allocating pitches that includes grass and 3G surfaces, especially now as the Council is developing more 3G pitches.

❖ **Leagues' Views**

All of the Leagues are satisfied with the allocation process, however the Down Area Winter League would like the present arrangement to continue,

⁽³⁾ Usage information for the September to December period in each year.

that is, five of their teams book pitches directly with the Council. The Leagues noted some service issues relating to the allocation of pitches:-

- The cancellation 'hotline' should be reviewed.
- Leagues prefer to be invoiced monthly.
- The pre-season meeting between the Council and the Leagues usually starts at 5.00pm which the Leagues reckon is too early.

These service issues have not been explored in depth, however it's noted that the cancellations process has changed during the course of this review as the Council has brought the process back 'in-house'.

❖ **Small Sided Games**

The IFA's Small Sided Games (SSG) programme involves around 160 teams playing each week in Belfast on Saturday morning as a League competition in two blocks, each lasting 11 weeks. The programme presently uses 5 Council sites, however demand is such that it also uses a number of non-Council 3G facilities. The IFA's aspiration is to have four SSG 'hubs' throughout the City, with suggested sites being the Grove Playing Fields, Ormeau Park, Mallusk Playing Fields and Cherryvale Playing Fields. This would have displacement implications for youth Leagues and poses the risk of other operational issues. Small Sided Games is a priority for the IFA and it will continue to explore its potential as the programme develops.

2. Introduction

2.1 Belfast City Council has commissioned Otium Leisure Consultancy to review the Council's Grass Soccer Pitches Allocation process. The Council makes available 66 of its grass soccer pitches to a number of Leagues (and a small number of clubs) for Saturday matches in the playing season. Due to a number of influences the Council feels a review of the allocation process is timely:

- ❖ The introduction of Local Government Reform which resulted in an increase in the number of teams and pitches in the Council area.
- ❖ General under-usage of pitches identified within the previous season.
- ❖ Requests received for use of pitches from Leagues outside of Belfast.
- ❖ Council is receiving competing requests for recently upgraded facilities such as the new pitch and changing pavilion at the Waterworks site (Westlands).

2.2 The Council's brief for this commission is summarised as follows:-

- ❖ A completed options appraisal for the management of the grass soccer pitches allocation process.
- ❖ A robust process for the allocation of grass soccer pitches to Leagues in the 2016/17 season and thereafter to manage requests from existing Leagues and any potential requests from Leagues i.e. where there is spare capacity, where there is under-usage of pitches by a League or Leagues during the season, where there are competing requests for a site / pitch and where there is displacement as a result of the closure of facilities.
- ❖ Identify sites / pitches for Small Sided Games and the implications on the provision of 11 a-side-pitches.
- ❖ Provide recommendations on service improvements for the efficient allocation of soccer pitches.

2.3 The review process is detailed by the Council:-

Stage 1a – Supply and demand analysis

- ❖ Analyse the demand for grass soccer pitches by junior and senior Leagues and ladies' soccer including casual use by existing users and non-users. The Council undertook a review of supply and demand in early 2013 and this should be used as the basis for this analysis.
- ❖ Analyse the demand for Small-Sided Games and identify potential sites/pitches that could meet this demand.
- ❖ Engage with the relevant stakeholders including existing Leagues, governing bodies, Leagues from the adjoining Council areas, BCC staff / Elected Members and Greenwich Leisure Ltd.
- ❖ Consider the implications of 3G provision on the usage of grass soccer pitches.

Stage 1b – Appraisal of management options

- ❖ Undertake an Options appraisal for the future management of the grass soccer pitches allocation process. This appraisal should consider the following options:
 - Allocation of pitches on a first come first served basis through the central pitches booking line.
 - Allocation of pitches to teams through an agreed process.
 - Allocation of pitches to Leagues through an agreed process – Leagues will then allocate to teams.
 - Allocation of pitches to another body such as the IFA through an agreed process – this body will then allocate them to teams.
 - Any other options as identified by the Contractor through benchmarking with elsewhere.
- ❖ The analysis of each Option should include the cost and resource implications for the Council for both the allocation of soccer pitches and the subsequent management of fixtures throughout the season.

Stage 2 – Recommendation of option and process to be used for allocation

- ❖ Submit report of findings of stages 1a and 1b and make recommendations around the preferred option for the allocation of pitches.

- ❖ Identify criteria which a League / Team etc must fulfil to be eligible for the allocation of pitches.

- ❖ Provide a process of how the allocation should work including criteria that should be applied: if there is more than one request for a site / pitch; where there is spare capacity; where there is under-usage of pitches during the season and where there is displacement as a result of the closure of facilities.

- ❖ A preliminary equality screening to identify any potential differential impacts and possible mitigating actions.

3. Methodology

Research and Consultation

- 3.1 Leagues' Survey** – a survey of the current Leagues which are allocated Belfast City Council grass association football pitches was carried out online via Survey Monkey. Of the 10 Leagues currently allocated pitches 8 completed questionnaires. Two clubs also completed the survey as they are allocated pitches directly by the Council. The purpose of the survey was to gather views from the Leagues on; workability and flexibility of the current allocation process, suggestions for any changes and further information of 3G provision for matches.
- 3.2 Leagues' Focus Group Meeting** – the meeting allowed further opportunity to explore the current pitch allocation process and highlight any operational issues. The focus group meeting was attended by all Leagues except the Boy's Brigade Old Boys, and the IFA Small Sided Games project for which feedback was captured in a separate consultation.
- 3.3 Consultations** – the following consultations were carried out:-
- ❖ Belfast City Council Elected Members
 - ❖ Belfast City Council Officers
 - ❖ Irish Football Association
- 3.4 Other Councils** - five other Councils were contacted to gather information on their pitch allocation processes for comparative purposes.

Reporting

- 3.5** The findings of the research are presented under a series of sub headings:-
- ❖ Context
 - ❖ Current allocation process
 - ❖ Pitch usage by Leagues
 - ❖ Consultations

3.6 The findings assist in identifying and analysing a series of Options as to how the Council might approach the pitches allocation process. Seven Options are identified and assessed against four criterion; *workability*, *acceptability*, *manageability*, and *affordability*. The assessments are scored to produce a rank order for the Options. Finally, a set of criteria relating to *eligibility and allocations* is put forward to assist decision making at two levels:-

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Level 1 | Allocating pitches to Leagues at the commencement of each season. |
| Level 2 | Managing requests in relation to a range of scenarios including spare capacity, under-usage, competing requests for a pitch and incidences of displacement. |

4. Research and Consultation

Context

- 4.1 The Council currently allocates 66 grass soccer pitches to 6 adult and 4 youth Leagues to accommodate Saturday soccer fixtures from September to April each year. Each pitch generally has the capacity to sustain two matches, one youth match on Saturday morning followed by an adult match on Saturday afternoon. In addition, Leagues can book the Council's 3G facilities at Ballysillan, Brook, Olympia and Whiterock Leisure Centres and also at Ormeau Park, Marrowbone Park and Cliftonville Park for training and matches. All 3G pitch allocations and bookings are handled directly by Greenwich Leisure Limited and are not included in any recommended allocation process as part of this report.
- 4.2 Grass soccer pitch allocations for the 2015/16 season for each League together with League size and the number of Belfast based teams in the League are as follows:-

Table 4.1 – Grass Soccer Pitch Allocation 2015/2016

Age Group	League Name	Total number of teams in League	Teams based in Belfast using Council pitches		Number of pitches allocated in 2015/16
			No.	%	
Adult (Saturday afternoon)	B&D Belfast and District	46	46	100%	23
	BBOB Boy's Brigade Old Boys	10	5	50%	7
	NAFL Northern Amateur Football League	173	16	9%	7
	NIFL Northern Ireland Football League	52	4	7%	2
	SAFL South Antrim Football League	31	10	32%	8
	DAWL Down Area Winter League	50	5	10%	5
Totals/average %		362	86	24%	52
Youth (Saturday mornings)	LYIL Lisburn Youth Invitational League	120	60	50%	2
	IFA SSG Irish Football Association Small Sided Games	160	150	94%	8
	NIBFA Northern Ireland Boys Football Association	134	50	37%	12
	SBYL South Belfast Youth League	300	150	50%	44
Totals/average %		714	410	57%	66

Comments

- ❖ The total number of allocated pitches for Saturday afternoon fixtures is 52 with spare capacity of up to 14 pitches for casual bookings.
- ❖ All of the 66 pitches made available by the Council are allocated to youth Leagues on Saturday morning with no spare allocation capacity.
- ❖ Belfast and District (B&D) League has the largest allocation of the adult Leagues at 23 pitches – this League is wholly comprised of Belfast based teams.
- ❖ South Belfast Youth League (SBYL) has the largest allocation of 44 pitches on Saturday mornings – approximately half of SBYL teams are from outside Belfast. The League also uses pitches in Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council and Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council.
- ❖ Lisburn Youth Invitational League (LYIL) plays the majority of its fixtures on Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council pitches – the League currently is allocated 2 pitches at Fullerton Park which came under Belfast City Council control with Local Government Reform in 2015. LYIL notes that approximately half of its teams are based in Belfast.

Current Allocation Process

- 4.3 The current allocation process largely dates back to the 1970's, when all grass soccer pitch allocation requests and subsequent bookings were handled by the Council. With changes to the Down Area Winter League in the 1990's, Belfast based teams Corrymeela FC and Vision Athletic FC were permitted to request and book pitches directly from the Council. With Local Government Reform in 2015, the 8th Old Boy's FC, playing in the DAWL, is also now permitted to request and book pitches directly from the Council. Recent requests from a further two DAWL clubs, Shorts FC and Stranmillis FC, brings the total number of clubs allocated and booking pitches directly from the Council to 5 – all other clubs playing on Council pitches are allocated pitches through the League with which they are registered.

Pitch Allocation Process

4.4 The Council's current pitch allocation process comprises the following:-

- 1) All existing Leagues and clubs are contacted in June of each year and issued a pitch allocation template requesting them to complete and return it by early July.
- 2) On receipt of the Leagues' pitch requests, the Council allocates pitches to the Leagues.
- 3) All Leagues are invited to a meeting with the Council in August; agenda items include: Pitch Allocations, Fixtures & Cancellations, Invoicing, Pitch Quality & Standards.

Current Pitch Allocation Criteria

4.5 The following criterion are applied by the Council when allocating pitches to the Leagues:-

1. Pitch allocation is made based on previous season's allocation.
2. If more than one League requests a pitch, the League which had the pitch the previous year gets preference.
3. If a League requests extra capacity it will only be accommodated after all other Leagues have been allocated as per previous year.
4. If there is spare capacity and two Leagues request extra pitches, the number of pitches both Leagues have already will be taken into consideration - extra pitches are usually awarded to the League with the least number of pitches, unless valid reasons are provided to allow a different decision.
5. Once all the Leagues' allocations are completed, any pitches that are left over will be available to the Leagues up to Thursday of each week during the playing season. Thereafter they will be made available to the general public.

6. Multiple requests for the same pitch is a rare occurrence and there is no formal policy to address multiple requests – however if the first criteria is applied this becomes redundant.
7. Requests from a new League will only be accommodated after existing Leagues have been allocated.

4.6 In addition the following pitch allocation proposal was adopted by the Council in 2003:-

"The system used in allocating pitches, with exception of Blanchflower Stadium, be as follows:

- i. *To continue to ensure as best as possible the various Leagues and other organisations who allocate the pitches ensure that Belfast teams receive first preference;*
- ii. *To emphasise to the Leagues that there is a need to allow local teams to play at their nearest pitch. There is also a need to recognise that because of the unequal distribution of pitches throughout the City this is very difficult for Leagues to implement fully;*
- iii. *Belfast based Irish League Clubs be permitted to book pitches."*

Use of Public Space Agreement

4.7 The Leagues are required to complete and sign block booking forms at the start of the season and by doing this they agree to adhere to the 'Conditions of Hire for Use of Council Facilities'. Greenwich Leisure Limited is responsible for issuing such booking documentation⁽¹⁾. In addition, each park or playing field site is governed by Bye Laws to which all users are required to adhere. These relate to general usage of the park such as public access, protection of property, sport, games, meetings and vehicles etc. There is no formal written agreement with a League.

Displacement

4.8 The Council reports displacement has occurred on a number of occasions whereby pitches or changing facilities are not available due to refurbishment or renovation works, for example, the changing pavilion at Henry Jones Playing Fields was closed for the 2015/16 season to enable refurbishment works to be undertaken. Temporary changing accommodation was not provided and so the fixtures allocated to the pitches were accommodated at other sites.

⁽¹⁾ This process has changed during the course of this review.

4.9 At Wedderburn Playing Fields, again, due to refurbishment of the Pavilion, temporary changing accommodation with reduced facilities was provided. This necessitated the cancellation of matches at this site in the afternoons for adult fixtures. The two Leagues involved agreed to share the pitch at Wedderburn and to also use a pitch at Fullerton Park on alternative weeks.

Pitch Usage by Leagues

Grass Pitches

4.10 The Council's grass pitch allocation process allows each League to preferentially book pitches (from their allocation) each week to accommodate Saturday matches (and also mid-week fixtures from April to early May) after which any unused pitch allocation is made available to other Leagues and casual users. An analysis of each League's pitch usage is presented in appendices (Appendix 1), showing and comparing pitch usage data for the September to December period in 2014 and in 2015. Appendix 2 shows the average results in graph format for each of the adult Leagues. The following table summarises the data:-

Table 4.2: Average percentage pitch usage for September to December in 2014 and 2015

League/Club	Average % pitch usage (of total allocation) Sept 2014 to Dec 2014	Average % pitch usage (of total allocation) Sept 2015 to Dec 2015	No. of allocated pitches
ADULT LEAGUES/CLUBS			
B&D	67%	63%	23
BBOB	60%	32%	7
NAFL	60%	41%	7
NIFL	38%	29%	2
SAFL	42%	22%	8
Corrymeela FC	82%	56%	1
Vision Athletic FC	no info	39%	1
Stranmillis FC	no info	44%	1
Shorts FC	no info	0%	1
YOUTH LEAGUES			
LYIL	no info	27%	2
IFA SSG	no info	73%	8
NIBFA	no info	18%	12
SBYL	52%	28%	44
<i>Average overall %</i>	59%	36%	

4.11 It should be noted that the data does not record the reason why pitch allocations are not fully utilised, however it is presumed the two main reasons for unused allocation are: (i) weather/pitch condition, and (ii) match scheduling. Also cup matches may be drawn away. Initial analysis shows considerable variation in usage between months, across pitches and pitch sites and large differences between Leagues.

4.12 A number of observations are made:-

- ❖ The Belfast & District League (B&D) has a total allocation of 23 pitches over 9 sites; its average pitch usage is well over 50% for both of the periods of use being compared.
- ❖ The Boy's Brigade Old Boys League (BBOB) shows significantly less usage of its allocation in 2015 compared to 2014, indicating that the League may be decreasing in size.
- ❖ With Local Government Reform the Northern Amateur Football League's (NAFL) pitch allocation now includes the Brook and Fullerton Park, both previously within the former Lisburn City Council. This may explain the large drop in usage of the NAFL's allocation at Mallusk Playing Fields, from 75% in 2014 to 23% in 2015.
- ❖ Pitch usage by the South Antrim Football League (SAFL) in 2015 is well below 50% across six sites, perhaps indicating over-allocation.
- ❖ The South Belfast Youth League (SBYL) has the largest pitch allocation of all Leagues at 44 pitches across 12 sites in 2015.

3G Pitch Usage

4.13 The use of 3G pitches is an increasingly attractive option to Leagues due to their higher carrying capacity⁽⁵⁾, flexibility in match scheduling and reduced reliance on 'good' weather. Their continued use may result in a decline in grass pitch usage.

⁽⁵⁾ Sport NI reckons 3G pitches are equivalent to at least 4 and up to 6 grass pitches.

Review of Grass Soccer Pitches Allocation Process

4.14 Looking at the 3G pitch bookings for Ballysillan, Olympia and Whiterock for the time period April 2014 to Dec 2014¹⁶⁾, usage is limited to IFA SSG and SBYL. SBYL reports there is no spare grass pitch allocation making it necessary for them to use 3G pitches. However as demonstrated in Table 4.2 SBYL appears not to use their full grass pitch allocation, e.g. their average grass pitch usage for their total allocation for the period Sept 14 to Dec 14 was 52%. It is unclear at this point whether unused quota by the SBYL is due to pitch conditions or League fixtures or over-allocation.

Month	Booking Day	IFA SSG Ballysillan 3G	SBYL Olympia 3G	SBYL Whiterock 3G
Sep-14	Total Friday evening usage (hours)	3	8	2
	Total Saturday morning hours	12	16	4
Oct-14	Total Friday evening usage (hours)	1	10	4
	Total Saturday morning hours	12	16	8
Nov-14	Total Friday evening usage (hours)	0	8	4
	Total Saturday morning hours	9	20	8
Dec-14	Total Friday evening usage (hours)	0	6	3
	Total Saturday morning hours	0	12	8
Totals (hours)		37	96	41

4.15 In order to fully utilise pitch usage data, analysis over a longer time period would be necessary together with further information on whether non-usage of pitches is due to cancellations or non-utilisation by Leagues. On the basis of this review there does appear to be considerable non-utilisation by Leagues.

Consultations

4.16 In order to inform this review the following consultations were carried out:

- ❖ Belfast City Council Elected Members.
- ❖ Belfast City Council Officers.
- ❖ Leagues and Clubs – Survey and Focus Group meeting.
- ❖ IFA – Belfast Games Development Officer.
- ❖ Other Councils.

¹⁶⁾ Bookings for the Council's 4 other 3G pitches were not available at the time of this report – also booking information was only available for the period April 2014 to December 2014 – more recent booking information was not available.

Elected Members Consultation

4.17 A consultation session was held with Belfast City Council elected Members and officers on Friday 26th February at City Hall, Belfast. The following comments and questions were recorded:

- ❖ There is inconsistency in pitch allocations to both Leagues and teams - general consensus that all should follow the same equitable process.
- ❖ There is a need for a pitch allocation process that is future-proofed and caters for the large number of youth teams as they move into adult levels.
- ❖ Is the Council providing pitches for teams outside the area? Are Belfast teams able to get pitches before outside teams?
- ❖ There is a need for a review of the price of 3G pitches facilities – 3G facilities are regarded as income generators. Perhaps hire fees should reflect on-going maintenance and replacement carpet costs only?
- ❖ The size and condition of changing accommodation at some Council pitch sites may constrain maximum pitch usage e.g. if there are 6 pitches but only enough changing accommodation for 4 adult teams the maximum number of pitches that can be utilised is 2. Council officers present noted Council is in the process of upgrading some of its changing accommodation under the Capital Investment Programme.
- ❖ There appears to be spare pitch capacity at adult level football – is the number of adult teams decreasing compared to a few years ago – could this trend be reversed or reduced?
- ❖ The dedication of pitch sites to permanent Small Sided Games hubs could potentially lead to revenue loss for the Council.

Belfast City Council Officers

4.18 A consultation meeting was held in January 2016 with a Council officer involved in outdoor recreation. The purpose of the meeting was to gain information on the Council's pitch supply and demand, allocation process and any operational points relevant to this commission. The following key points are noted:

- ❖ In general the pitch allocation works well with the 10 existing Leagues however the allocation of pitches directly to the 5 DAWL clubs is viewed as an inconsistency, both increasing the administrative burden and setting a

precedent for more clubs to similarly request bookings directly from the Council.

- ❖ Weekly pitch bookings must be confirmed to Greenwich Leisure Limited⁽⁷⁾ by 2.00pm on Tuesdays after which point any unused pitch allocation can be offered to other Leagues. There have been some difficulties in making contact with Greenwich Leisure Limited on the bookings line. If there is no uptake by other Leagues, pitches can be offered to casual users after 2.00pm Thursday. Often there is little uptake by casual users at this point as the officer reckons it is perceived that all the pitches are being used by the Leagues.
- ❖ Unused allocation is clearly an issue. A record of unused allocation could be taken into account in allocations for the following season. Accurate pitch booking information may identify sufficient spare capacity to invite outside Leagues to use Council pitches.
- ❖ The officer noted recent multiple requests for Westlands pitch at the Waterworks complex in North Belfast which has undergone upgrading works to both the pitch and changing accommodation. The pitch has historically been allocated to the Boy's Brigade Old Boys League and been home to the 92nd Old Boy's FC which has 3 adult teams. Three additional clubs have requested use of the pitch – the pitch is closed for the 2015/16 season until the pitch allocation process has been reviewed.
- ❖ There are nine⁽⁸⁾ women's soccer clubs based in Belfast; fixtures are controlled by the Northern Ireland's Women's Football Association (NIWFA) and largely take place on midweek evenings from April to September. The officer reports the NIWFA is not involved in the current pitch allocation process and in addition the current bookings information system does not easily allow analysis of demand and usage by women's teams. Bookings are logged under the heading of 'Casual Bookings' and can only be extracted through a resource intensive analysis of the booking name, eg, Cliftonville Ladies FC. The officer reports the Council does not currently store women's soccer pitch usage information. The officer also notes there is no easily

⁽⁷⁾ This process has changed during the course of this review.

⁽⁸⁾ Crusaders Strikers WFC, Cliftonville Ladies FC, Cuman Spairt an Phobail LFC, St Oliver Plunkett's Ladies FC, PSNI LFC, St Matthews Ladies FC, Glentoran LFC, Linfield LFC and Shankill Utd Predators LFC.

accessible data on the number of casual bookings for each pitch but reckons demand for casual pitch bookings does not outstrip supply – there is no detailed casual pitch booking information available at the time of compiling this report.

4.19 To explore these and other operational matters raised by the Leagues, one of the Council's officers involved in Parks was contacted. The officer's comments are summarised as follows:-

- ❖ **Cancellation Hotline** – currently officers alert pitch bookings staff on the playability of a pitch as soon as possible prior to a fixture – the cancellation hotline is then updated. For Saturday matches, just one officer is on duty covering all pitch sites across the city. The weekend on-duty officer updates the cancellation hotline as needed and in many cases the referee makes the final decision on pitch playability. The officer reports that staff are reluctant to deem a pitch unplayable on Saturdays as this impacts on customer service.
- ❖ **Grass Cutting** - The officer reports that each pitch is cut approximately 32 times a year; the majority of cuts take place between April and October. Grass cutting does not go ahead if the ground conditions are too wet.
- ❖ **Pitch Usage** – The officer reports significant under usage for the 2015/2016 season. The maximum number of matches played at Mallusk Playing Fields (24 pitches) on any given Saturday morning or afternoon slot is fifteen, the minimum number of matches is just two. The officer reckons the demand for 3G pitches has had an impact on grass pitch usage. Periodic construction at sites and midweek training sessions on some floodlit grass pitches may be factors which impact on the availability of the same pitches on a League basis at weekends.
- ❖ **Small Sided Games** – On initial review, Mallusk Playing Fields may lend itself to development as a Small Sided Games hub but this would require further exploration.
- ❖ **Women's Association Football** – The officer remarks that currently there is limited demand for adult women's football matches at Mallusk, Loughside and Ballysillan Playing Fields. Mallusk Playing Fields maintains three summer

pitches and has dedicated changing facilities to accommodate women's fixtures, which run from April to September. He notes Mallusk Playing Fields successfully accommodated a large girl's football tournament last summer with approximately 1,200 participants.

- ❖ **Extension to playing season** – The officer observes that all Council grass pitches are open to 9.00pm from the beginning of April, providing sufficient time to allow un-played fixtures to be accommodated mid-week. The officer also notes that current demand for Saturday pitches in April is low and therefore he does not expect a need for an extension to the playing season till the end of May. The officer observes it is recommended that all grass pitches should have a minimum of 12 weeks resting period, so providing sufficient time for maintenance and re-growth prior to the start of the next season.

Irish Football Association (IFA) – Belfast Small Sided Games

4.20 A consultation meeting was held with the IFA's Grassroots Games Development Officer for East and North Belfast in January 2016. The purpose of the meeting was to review demand and explore possible sites for the Small Sided Games initiative.

4.21 The IFA's Small Sided Games initiative is the cornerstone of how youngsters are introduced to and play association football. Launched in Belfast in 2008 it has grown from 8 teams to 160 teams in 2015/16, operating as a League competition in two blocks, each lasting 11 weeks:-

- ❖ September to mid-November
- ❖ End of February to start of May

The success of SSG's is attributed to the child-centred ethos which parents and clubs are embracing. There are four age groups.

Age	Team Size	Squad	Pitch Size	Goals Size
Under 8's	Five-a-side	8	35mx25m	3.65mx1.83m
Under 9's	Seven-a-side	10	55mx35m	3.65mx1.83m
Under 10's	Seven-a-side	10	55mx35m	3.63mx1.83m
Under 11's	Nine-a-side	12	65mx45m	4.87mx2.13m

Matches are played on Saturday mornings generally in three time slots; 9.00am – 10.00am, 10.00am – 11.00am, 11.00am – 12noon. The duration and structure of matches is specified as follows:-

Five-a-side	–	3 periods of play, each 12 minutes
Seven-a-side	–	3 periods of play, each 15 minutes
Nine-a-side	–	2 periods of play, each 25 minutes

4.22 The IFA introduced the SSG's initiative to improve the experience for young players not only by establishing a pitch size appropriate to the age of the child but also in dealing with issues such as parental interference. Rather than focusing on winning the emphasis is on development, both of children and coaches.

4.23 The following key points are noted:

- ❖ The hugely successful Small Sided Games programme now caters for 160 teams from across Belfast for young players aged 6 to 11 years old. Given the average participation of 1,600 players (average of 10 per team) on a weekly basis, the IFA reckons this is the largest community youth games programme in the Council area.
- ❖ The Belfast SSG programme uses the following Council venues:-
 - Blanchflower Playing Fields x 5 pitches
 - King George V Playing Fields x 3 pitches
 - Ballysillan 3G pitch
 - Hammer 3G pitch
 - Inverary Playing Fields
- ❖ Due to insufficient 3G Council SSG facilities, the Belfast SSG programme also uses:-
 - Play Ball, Stormont
 - Colin Valley FC
 - St Malachy's College
 - Queen's University 3G pitches
- ❖ The 3G pitch at Olympia Leisure Centre was previously used but due to a booking issue is no longer available.

- ❖ Currently there is no permanent provision for Small Sided Games within the Council area; most sites have to be adapted with the addition of portable goals and cones to delineate differing pitch sizes, an additional management task.
- ❖ Five nine-a-side pitches are marked at Blanchflower Playing Fields – however these are over-marked in white on existing 11-a-side pitches (also marked in white). This can confuse the young players. Over-marking of the pitches in bright blue or yellow would make games easier and more enjoyable for all.
- ❖ The preference for delivery of the SSG programme is for a single site/'hub' that can easily accommodate different ages with sufficient parking and basic catering provision for parents and coaches. According to the IFA an ideal 'hub' for Small Sided Games in Belfast, assuming there would be four such hubs throughout the city, would comprise:-

- 3 or 4 5-a-side courts
- 3 or 4 7-a-side courts
- 2 9-a-side courts

These hubs would accommodate existing demand and allow for future expansion; suggested sites for the provision of SSG's are the Grove Playing Fields, Ormeau Park, Mallusk Playing Fields and Cherryvale Playing Fields. Should such a facility be developed this would have obvious implications relating to displacement from existing facilities, both Council and non-Council. It would also pose operational issues such as the over-marking of pitches. Small Sided Games is a priority for the IFA and it will continue to explore its potential as the programme develops.

Leagues' Consultation – Survey

4.24 The 10 Leagues and 5 clubs currently allocated Council pitches were invited to complete a questionnaire covering the current pitch allocation process, any suggested changes to the allocation process and the impact of the development of 3G pitches on match scheduling. Appendix 3 presents the survey results in full. The following Leagues and clubs completed the online questionnaire:

- ❖ Belfast and District League (B&D)
- ❖ Northern Amateur Football League (NAFL)
- ❖ Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL)

- ❖ South Antrim Football League (SFAL)
 - ❖ Lisburn Invitational Youth League (LIYL)
 - ❖ NI Boy's Football League (NIBFA)
 - ❖ South Belfast Youth League (SBYL)
 - ❖ Down Area Winter League (DAWL)
 - ❖ Corrymeela FC
 - ❖ Vision FC
- } Combined to form one collective response

4.25 No survey returns were received for the Boy's Brigade Old Boys and IFA Leagues. The IFA's views were comprehensively covered in a separate consultation and the BBOB League declined to be involved in the review process. Three responses were received for DAWL; 2 clubs (Vision Athletic FC and Corrymeela FC) and the League secretary – these 3 responses are collated as one single collective response for DAWL giving a total of 8 responses to the survey. Survey findings are summarised as follows:-

- ❖ The present pitches allocation process is reckoned to work either 'very well' (63% of respondents) or 'works' (37% of respondents). Some of the respondents noted very favourable comments in relation to the service delivered by Council staff.
- ❖ Asked to record 'challenges' with the pitches allocation process, again some favourable comments were returned by the respondents; eg, "I find the staff does a great job." Corrymeela FC, one of the five teams allocated a pitch directly by the Council and playing in the Down Area Winter League, emphasised that any change to the present allocation process will adversely affect the club.
- ❖ The survey asked respondents to suggest any improvements or changes to the present process. Responses included a suggestion that, due to difficulties experienced in making contact by telephone, League secretaries should be advised by email who the weekend 'on call' person is.
- ❖ All the respondents endorse the use of 3G pitches for matches and training whilst 3 of the 8 respondents presently book 3G pitches in Belfast.

Leagues' Consultation – Focus Group

4.26 The following seven Leagues and one club attended the Leagues' Focus Group in February at the Agape Centre, Lisburn Road, Belfast:-

- ❖ Belfast and District League (B&D)
- ❖ Down Area Winter League (DAWL)
- ❖ Lisburn Invitational Youth League (LIYL)
- ❖ NI Boy's Football League (NIBFA)
- ❖ Northern Amateur Football League (NAFL)
- ❖ South Antrim Football League (SFAL)
- ❖ South Belfast Youth League (SBYL)
- ❖ Corrymeela FC

4.27 The Leagues' Focus Group provided the opportunity to further explore the pitch allocation process, 3G pitches and any other pitch related issues. The focus group meeting was positive and informative, addressing the following topics:-

1. Pitch Allocation Process
2. Home Pitches
3. 3G Pitches
4. Final Comments

4.28 Key findings (full responses presented in Appendix 4) are summarised as follows:-

- ❖ The majority of the Leagues are satisfied with the current allocation process.
- ❖ DAWL would like the current arrangement to continue, ie, 5 of their clubs book directly with Council.
- ❖ Other Leagues were not previously aware a small number of clubs in DAWL are allocated pitches directly from Council – the general consensus appears to be this is not equitable.
- ❖ NAFL noted that:
 - Belfast City Council is the only Council with which they have to book pitches on behalf of teams.
 - They have a legal agreement between League and clubs.
 - There is a 'cost' to the League for BCC pitch booking.
- ❖ Youth Leagues would like to continue to manage pitch allocations, weekly bookings and subsequent payments.
- ❖ Home pitches are assigned on historical use/discretion of Leagues.
- ❖ Leagues do not feel it is their role to be involved in the current Westland pitch allocation – Council's decision.

4.29 The following operational points are noted:

- ❖ Cancellation Hotline unsatisfactory.
- ❖ Pitch maintenance not always satisfactory.
- ❖ Leagues prefer to be invoiced monthly.
- ❖ Unused pitch allocation is due to weather and fixture schedules.
- ❖ Leagues would like to see pitch open season extended until the end of May.
- ❖ Floodlit grass pitches at Ballysillan and Loughside should only be used for mid-week matches, not training.
- ❖ Council meeting with Leagues in July/August at 5pm is too early.
- ❖ 3G facilities are too expensive – price should be comparable to grass.

Other Councils

4.30 It is of interest to present information on other Councils' pitch allocation processes, noting that the comparator Councils do not operate as many pitches as Belfast City Council, therefore it may be easier to allocate pitches directly to teams. Also, the Council is addressing emerging issues that may or may not have arisen elsewhere. Five neighbouring Councils were contacted; see summary below⁽⁹⁾:-

Council	Allocated to Leagues (YES/NO)	Allocated to Clubs/Teams (YES/NO)	Criteria for allocation
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	No	Yes – All teams allocated and book pitches	Historical use
Ards & North Down Legacy Council	No	Yes – All teams allocated and book pitches	Historical use
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	Yes - Youth League	Yes – Adult teams only allocated and book pitches	Historical use, credit rating, membership base
Newry Mourne & Down District Council	Yes – All Leagues	No direct block booking by teams	Historical use
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	Yes – Adult Leagues	Yes - Clubs/teams	Leagues assign home pitch no formal criteria/policy – Leagues cooperate

⁽⁹⁾ Although Councils have merged with Local Government Reform some pitch allocation processes pertain to Legacy Councils. It is noted that some 'new' Councils have differing policies between their respective Legacy Councils.

4.31 It is evident that pitch allocation processes and criteria vary from Council to Council with no 'one size fits all'. For example Newry, Mourne & Down District Council allocates pitches to the football Leagues only, whilst Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council allocates to teams only (both youth and adult). Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council was able to forward formal allocation criteria (copied below); other Councils appear not to have a formal allocation criteria, basing allocation mainly on pitches used in the previous season i.e. historical use.

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council criteria used for the allocation of grass and synthetic pitches 2015/2016:^[10]

1. *Applications received by the due date will be considered together.*
2. *Applications received after the due date will not be considered in the first stage of the allocation process but may be allocated on a first come first serve basis were applicable.*
3. *Intermediate pitches will be allocated to those teams that are required to have an intermediate standard pitch by their League or governing body.*
4. *Preference will be given to applications from existing local teams, notwithstanding item 5, those who currently have been allocated for the 2014/15 football season. For any remaining allocations, teams will be ranked with those having the greatest number of player's resident within Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council.*
5. *Teams will be ranked in accordance with their booking history and Council payment history with the former Castlereagh Borough Council. Teams with a longer unbroken booking and good payment history will be ranked more highly than teams with shorter booking and bad payment history.*

^[10] *Each criterion is applied in-turn until all the demand has been met, or until all the pitches available have been allocated.*

5. Options Analysis

Introduction

5.1 Due to the addition of pitches and teams (as a result of Local Government Reform), competing requests for the same pitch, identified under-usage of allocated pitches and pitch requests from Leagues outside the area, the Council's current pitch allocation process is in need of updating. This section looks at management options for the Council's grass soccer pitch allocation process that could potentially deliver a solution to a greater or lesser extent.

Options

5.2 Seven Options relating to management of the pitches allocation process were identified. Each of seven Options is assessed under the following four criterion:-

Criterion Number	Description	Rationale
1	Workability	How would the option work in practice? How would it satisfy the requirements of all stakeholders? What are the risks of it not working properly or failing outright? Will it work in the short and long term? Can it cope with changing circumstances? How might it measure up to equality screening? Will it facilitate smooth allocation of pitches? Can it cope with spare capacity, under-usage, competing requests and displacement through facility closure?
2	Acceptability	Will each of the stakeholders accept the system; can it be demonstrated to work successfully elsewhere? Will the stakeholders accept the operator if it isn't the Council?
3	Manageability	Is the option safe from abuse and/or fraud? Will it produce management information suited to the Council's needs? Is it transparent and accountable? What are the risks of management failure?
4	Affordability	How much will it cost to operate? What income will it generate, if any? What staff resources are needed? What system resources are needed? What are the resource implications for allocating pitches and managing fixtures?

Each Option is scored against each criterion with a maximum score of 3 available where:-

- 3 Demonstrates excellent fit with the criterion
- 2 Demonstrates some fit with the criterion
- 1 Limited fit with the criterion
- 0 No fit with the criterion

5.3 The Options are presented in rank order along with the total score given to each.

Rank	Option Number	Option Description	Score
1	Option 4	Leagues allocate pitches to teams. The Council allocates pitches exclusively to Leagues by an agreed process for onward allocation by the Leagues to teams.	11
2	Option 6	External organisation allocates pitches to teams. As in Option 4 the Council allocates pitches exclusively to the external organisation for onward allocation to teams.	7
3	Option 5	Pitches allocated to Youth Leagues and adult teams. The Council allocates pitches to youth leagues (for onward allocation to youth teams) and to adult teams. The allocation to adult teams to be through an agreed process.	5
4	Status Quo	Current allocation process confirmed. Wherein the majority of pitches are allocated to Leagues (n=10 Leagues in 2015) with a small number of pitches allocated directly to teams (n=5 clubs in 2015). The Council has the final decision on pitch allocation; this is communicated to Leagues prior to the beginning of the season. Leagues assign 'Home' pitches and clubs 'block' book a home pitch for the whole season.	4
5=	Option 2	Teams by lottery. The Council allocates directly to teams on a 'Lottery – Luck of the Draw' basis on application prior to the beginning of the season -- all teams applying get the same 'chance'/opportunity.	2
5=	Option 3	Teams through agreed process. The Council allocates pitches directly to teams through an agreed process taking into account: membership base, payment history, pitch usage in previous years and other criteria such as Club Mark accreditation, club player pathway from children through to adults, development status, League status etc.	2
7	Option 1	Teams, first come first served. Allocation of pitches on a first come first served basis through the central pitches booking line on a match by match basis for all teams (no. of adult teams approximately = 85, no. of youth teams = 260 ⁽¹¹⁾).	1

⁽¹¹⁾ Some of these teams are based outside the Council boundary – e.g. SBYL has approximately 300 teams of which 150 are based in Belfast – the majority of matches are played on Belfast City Council pitches. Number of youth teams does not include Small Sided Games teams.

5.4 The rationale for the scores against each of the four criterion is as follows:-

Option (in rank order by total score)	Workability	Acceptability	Manageability	Affordability	Total Score
Option 4 – All Leagues through agreed process	<p>This is a workable, attractive Option for the Council. Here only Leagues would be eligible to request pitches with the total number of Leagues likely to be around 10. Pitch allocation to Leagues would follow an agreed assessment criteria which complies with Active Belfast vision and equality screening. Leagues would be required to sign up to an internal pitch allocation process complying with Council's Playing Pitch use aims and objectives and equality.</p> <p>SCORE of 3</p>	<p>Acceptable to Council and majority of Leagues currently allocated pitches. However it is unlikely to be acceptable to DAWL which has up to 5 teams directly allocated pitches from Council. Newry, Mourne & Down District Council operate pitch allocations in this way.</p> <p>SCORE of 2</p>	<p>Easily managed with few changes to current management procedures – would potentially decrease management load with smaller number of users.</p> <p>SCORE of 3</p>	<p>Operational costs would be similar to current allocation process. Can be open and transparent through application of clear allocation criteria. All allocations to be made public to all Leagues.</p> <p>SCORE of 3</p>	TOTAL SCORE of 11
Option 6 – Other Body	<p>This is an attractive Option for the Council – all allocations and bookings would be managed by an external body under a Joint Management Board (JMB) agreement similar to Belfast City Council and Ulster GAA JMB agreement. The JMB agreement would ensure allocation and pitch use meets Active Belfast and Playing Pitch usage aims and objectives and complies with all relevant equality measures.</p> <p>SCORE of 3</p>	<p>Initial response from the IFA as a possible delivery partner suggested this Option would not be acceptable by them; there is no precedence for this kind of JMB agreement in other Councils. It is expected that the Leagues and clubs would be happy with a body such as the IFA managing the pitch allocations. It may be possible to attract a commercial delivery partner but at a cost to the Council.</p> <p>SCORE of 2</p>	<p>Initial response suggests this Option would currently not be manageable by the IFA without additional staffing and system resources. The option has the potential to be fair, equitable and transparent.</p> <p>SCORE of 1</p>	<p>The IFA's initial response notes adoption of this Option would need additional staffing and systems resources which would come at a cost to the Council. The IFA feels it is unclear at this stage if the IFA would benefit from involvement in the allocation of Belfast City Council pitches.</p> <p>SCORE of 1</p>	TOTAL SCORE of 7

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Option (In rank order by total score)	Workability	Acceptability	Manageability	Affordability	Total Score
Option 5 – Youth Leagues/Adult Teams through agreed process	Similar to Option 4 with a mix of pitch allocation to youth Leagues and directly to adult teams through an agreed process that complies with equality screening and meets Council's Active Belfast vision. Work load would be considerable given that there are in the region of 80 adult teams – all would have to apply separately and be allocated a 'home' pitch under an agreed process. SCORE of 2	This Option would suit the needs of the youth Leagues and probably the 3 smaller adult Leagues (NAFL, NIFL and DAWL). It is unlikely to be acceptable to the Council and the 2 larger adult Leagues (SAFL and B&D). This Option currently operates in Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council although with a smaller number of youth Leagues and adult teams. SCORE of 1	High risk of management failure due to high number of adult teams – considerable management workload to make this Option workable. SCORE of 1	Would require additional staffing and system resources to cope with large number of adult team allocations and subsequent bookings. SCORE of 1	TOTAL SCORE of 5
Status Quo	This Option has been operating for approx. 20 years with few difficulties. However it does not satisfy the requirements of the Council as the key stakeholder. There is a degree of risk associated if more clubs were to request direct pitch allocations, both increasing the workload and the potential for multiple pitch requests. Allocations are fairly smooth with no major concerns raised by current users. There is no formal pitch allocation policy and associated criteria e.g. there is no clear process on how to deal with competing requests. Current pitch usage displays significant under-usage. SCORE OF 2	The Council may not find this Option acceptable as there are two different allocation processes; one for Leagues and one for a small number of clubs. This Option poses a risk of precedence; if one League is permitted to allow their teams to book directly then why aren't other Leagues? However 'mixed' allocation between Leagues and clubs is seen in other Councils eg Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council and Mid & East Antrim Borough Council. SCORE OF 0	This Option is currently manageable and appears to be reasonably safe from abuse or fraud. There is a well-managed booking and invoicing system. Some pitch booking information is now available allowing the Council to plan maintenance programmes and look to maximise pitch usage. However the allocation process is not transparent – there are no formal allocation criteria. Each League does not know what other Leagues are allocated. SCORE OF 0	All staffing and system resources are in place and appear to be affordable. However one of the adult Leagues reports it takes significant volunteer resources to manage weekly bookings on behalf of their clubs. SCORE of 2	TOTAL SCORE of 4

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Option (In rank order by total score)	Workability	Acceptability	Manageability	Affordability	Total Score
Option 2 – Teams lottery	This Option is similar to Option 1 with even less input from users – all users would have the same chance of a pitch. Potential to maximise pitch usage. Unlikely to satisfy key stakeholders. High risk of not being workable. Difficult to administrate given the large number of teams. SCORE of 2	Would not be acceptable to users - allocation of a 'Home' pitch unlikely. Likely to increase tensions between Council and users. SCORE of 0	Same as for Option 1 but accentuated. SCORE of 0	Significant additional staffing and system resources needed compared to the status quo Option. Need for development of an electronic Lottery allocation programme. Potential to make fixture scheduling difficult due to lottery allocation process. SCORE of 0	TOTAL SCORE of 2
Option 3 – Teams through agreed process	Considerable workload with approximately 260 youth teams and 80 adult teams – all teams allocated a pitch only after meeting agreed criteria. May risk stability of youth Leagues. Dependent on all teams completing application process – high risk of not meeting deadline. Agreed allocation criteria should pass equality screening and comply with Active Belfast vision. Allocation will be time consuming and may not be conducive to smooth delivery. SCORE of 1	Unlikely to be acceptable to youth Leagues and two of the adult Leagues who view League control of allocations and bookings central to the success of their respective Leagues. Neighbouring Councils use this Option however they have fewer teams and pitches. SCORE of 0	This Option has the potential to be open and transparent with little chance of misuse or fraud. Will allow for detailed management records to be kept on each 'team' user. High risk of management failure due to the volume of records necessary. SCORE of 1	Considerable staff and system resources needed to cope with large number of adult and youth teams. The process of checking teams' criteria will be lengthy and expensive. SCORE of 0	TOTAL SCORE of 2
Option 1 – Teams first come first served	Would result in a significant increase in administration work load to accommodate some 80 adult teams and over 260 youth teams. High risk of not being workable. However this Option offers the potential of maximising pitch usage and income. SCORE of 1	This Option is likely not to be acceptable by any of the key stakeholders. Potential loss of 'Home' pitch status may impact negatively on club development. SCORE of 0	High risk of management failure – risk of loss of rapport/ links with the users and lack of ownership could reduce respect for facilities. Could lead to conflict between users. SCORE of 0	Would need significant additional staff and system resources to manage the large number of teams (over 300). Would also make fixture planning difficult. SCORE of 0	TOTAL SCORE of 1

Preliminary Equality Screening

- 5.5 At this stage a preliminary equality screening is considered, *“to identify any potential impacts and possible mitigating actions.”* The policy/decision under consideration relates to the process by which the Council allocates grass pitches each season for competitive play. Presently the majority of the pitches required for competitive play are allocated to soccer leagues who in turn allocate the pitches to the clubs/teams registered with them; this involves around 60 pitches each season. A small number of pitches (n=5 in 2015) are allocated by the Council directly to teams. Should the Council adopt the highest ranked Option (see above), all pitches required for competitive play within League structures would be allocated in the first instance to soccer Leagues, with no pitches allocated by the Council directly to teams. The aims of this policy are (i) to create a harmonised process for the Council’s allocation of grass pitches and (ii) develop effective partnerships with the Leagues on an equal basis in accordance with the spirit of the Belfast Agenda.
- 5.6 Consultation on the Council’s pitches allocation process has involved all the Leagues to which grass pitches have been allocated for the 2015/16 season, the teams to which grass pitches have been allocated directly in 2015/16, elected Members and officers, soccer’s governing body, the Irish Football Association and other Councils. Evidence has been gathered by survey, focus group, booking information and a consultation exercise.
- 5.7 Both the general soccer grass pitch allocation process (block bookings) and the criteria to be test applied when a site is in demand or new requests are received have been considered for any likely impacts positively or negatively from the recommendations being made.
- 5.8 Four preliminary questions were considered on the likely impact on those affected by the policy/ decision for each of the section 75 categories and it was generally found as soccer is a mixed sport and particularly promoted as such through the youth leagues where boys and girls participate together and pitches are available to everyone to book, there was minimal impact from aligning the grass pitch allocation booking process for block bookings. Alongside this, pitches can be accessed by casual bookings where a League in which a team operates does not wish to avail of the block booking process.

- 5.9** On initial review the alignment of the process will promote equal opportunity where currently the dual allocation process does not. Establishing a criteria supports equitable decision making where there is contest moving forward. The on-going dialogue with the governing bodies, Sport NI and the Leagues helps to ensure alignment to positively promote equal opportunity to everyone as the Council continues to strive for the wellbeing of all its citizens.

6. Eligibility and Allocations Criteria

Level 1

6.1 With at least 10 Leagues looking to use the Council's grass pitches at the start of each season, the Council needs a way to process the Leagues' requests. The first step is to consider whether a League is 'eligible' to ensure only officially recognised Leagues are allocated Council pitches. This can be done by checking governing body affiliation.

Question: Is the League recognised/affiliated to a governing body such as the IFA?

Response & Action: **Yes**, the League is recognised by/affiliated to a governing body such as the IFA; proceed to assessment.

No, the League is not recognised by/affiliated to a governing body such as the IFA; request denied.

Having checked eligibility the following assessment criteria and scoring matrix (Level 1) can be used when considering requests from Leagues for the use of grass soccer pitches. The assessment criteria are each given a weighting to reflect their importance within the assessment process. The highest scoring League will have its request considered first, the second highest scoring League will be considered second and so on.

LEVEL 1			
Assessment Criteria	Description	Score	Rationale
Belfast based teams 50% <i>Note: teams' 'home' pitch for the previous season can be used to demonstrate being Belfast based.</i>	The League demonstrates over 70% of their registered teams are based in Belfast.	3	Ensures priority is given to Belfast based teams. Leagues with a higher percentage of Belfast based clubs score higher.
	The League demonstrates 31% to 70% of their registered teams are based in Belfast.	2	
	The League demonstrates up to 30% of their registered teams are based in Belfast.	1	
	The League has no registered teams based in Belfast.	0	
Governance 25%	The League is well established with over 50% of their clubs having achieved a recognised Clubmark award.	3	Help the Council promote Clubmark accreditation and meet targets.
	The League is well established with 30% to 50% of their clubs having achieved a recognised Clubmark award.	2	
	The League has 20% to 30% of their clubs having achieved a recognised Clubmark award.	1	
	The League is not well established and has fewer than 20% having achieved a recognised Clubmark award.	0	
Outstanding debt 15%	The League does not have any outstanding debt with the Council	3	Ensures sound financial policies and targets are met.
	The League has outstanding debt with the Council of between 0-3 months	2	
	The League has outstanding debt with the Council off between 4-6 months	1	
	The League has outstanding debt with the Council off over 6 months	0	
Previous season's usage 10%	The League used over 80% of last season's allocation.	3	Helps prevent Leagues requesting more pitches than they need. Will allow the Council to maximise usage of its pitches.
	The League used between 50% to 80% of last season's allocation.	2	
	The League used between 30% to 50% of last season's allocation.	1	
	The League used under 30% of last season's allocation.	0	

Level 2

6.2 It is expected that the Leagues assign their pitch allocation to their registered teams. The following assessment criteria and weighted scoring (Level 2) can be used in the event of competing requests for a site/pitch.

LEVEL 2			
Assessment Criteria	Description	Score	Rationale
Home catchment 30% <i>Note: this information will be requested from the League and will be based on the registration info provided by the club to the League.</i>	The club demonstrates over 80% of their registered members live 'local' ⁽¹³⁾ to the requested pitch.	3	Ensures priority is given to clubs with the largest number of players living 'local' to the pitch – promotes local community based use.
	The club demonstrates 50% to 80% of their registered members live local to the requested pitch.	2	
	The club demonstrates 30% to 50% of their registered members live local to the requested pitch.	1	
	The club demonstrates fewer than 30% of their registered members live local to the requested pitch.	0	
Clubmark 25%	Club demonstrates Gold (or equivalent) Clubmark accreditation.	3	Promotes well managed clubs with sound management structures
	Club demonstrates Silver (or equivalent) Clubmark accreditation.	2	
	Club demonstrates Bronze (or equivalent) Clubmark accreditation.	1	
	Club does not have Clubmark	0	
Outstanding debt 10%	The League does not have any outstanding debt with the Council	3	Ensures sound financial policies and payment targets are met.
	The League has outstanding debt with the Council of between 0-3 months	2	
	The League has outstanding debt with the Council off between 4-6 months	1	
	The League has outstanding debt with the Council off over 6 months	0	

⁽¹³⁾ 'Local' is taken to mean living within a 15 minute walk from the pitch. This has been used previously in research for the Council's pitches strategy.

Belfast City Council
Review of Grass Soccer Pitches Allocation Process



Sports/Player pathway development including underrepresented groups 30%	The club has an active Sports Development Plan in place providing a clear pathway for children moving through the club to the adult game and demonstrating how they will increase participation from underrepresented groups including females and people with a disability.	3	Promotes well managed clubs with a long term vision for all age groups
	The club is working towards a Sports Development Plan providing a clear pathway for children moving through the club to the adult game and demonstrating how they will increase participation from underrepresented groups including females and people with a disability.	2	
	The club has a Sports Development Plan for development of adult club only and do not demonstrate how they will increase participation from underrepresented groups including females and people with a disability.	1	
	The Club does not have a Sports Development Plan and does not provide a clear pathway for children moving through the club nor do they demonstrate how they will increase participation from underrepresented groups including females and people with a disability.	0	
Previous pitch usage as a 'home' pitch 5%	Was the pitch your home ground in the previous season?	Yes - 3 No - 0	3 points go to the club(s) which were allocated the pitch as their home ground in the previous season.

Recognising that these criteria may produce more than one club achieving the same score, it is suggested that the final decision is made by the flip of a coin.

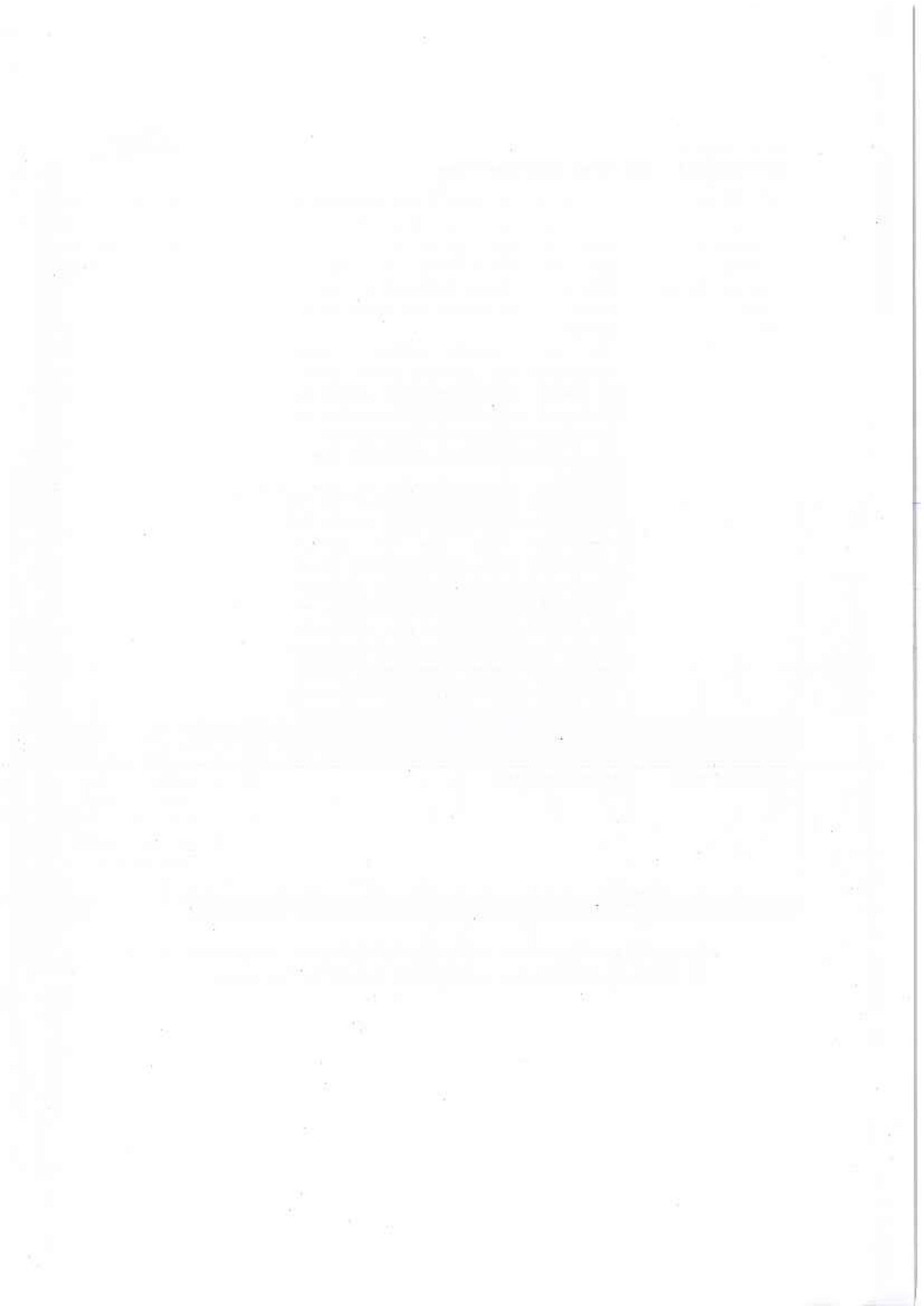


Table of Pitch Usage

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Percentage Pitch Usage by Leagues

League	Pitch Site	% usage Sep 14	% usage Sep 15	% usage Oct 14	% usage Oct 15	% usage Nov 14	% usage Nov 15	% usage Dec 14	% usage Dec 15	Average % usage Sept 14 to Dec 14	Average % usage Sept 15 to Dec 15
B&D (Adult)	Ballysillian	50%	100%	25%	80%	40%	50%	0%	25%	29%	64%
	Boucher Rd	0%	0%	38%	70%	140%	100%	67%	25%	61%	49%
	Cherryvale	88%	88%	88%	80%	70%	63%	67%	25%	78%	64%
	Falls	100%	100%	100%	70%	90%	75%	67%	25%	89%	68%
	Grove	58%	92%	92%	53%	47%	100%	78%	25%	69%	68%
	Mallusk	78%	98%	75%	46%	42%	55%	53%	40%	52%	60%
	Ormeau	100%	75%	100%	80%	40%	50%	100%	50%	85%	64%
	Strangford	100%	100%	100%	60%	60%	100%	0%	25%	65%	71%
	Woodvale	0%	125%	75%	100%	100%	100%	100%	50%	69%	94%
	Average (%)	72%	81%	77%	67%	66%	74%	54%	30%	67%	63%
	BBOB (Adult)	Cherryvale	50%	25%	50%	60%	40%	25%	0%	25%	35%
Grove		75%	25%	50%	0%	40%	25%	67%	0%	58%	13%
Mallusk		88%	13%	50%	40%	70%	25%	67%	13%	69%	23%
Ormeau		75%	138%	25%	10%	20%	13%	0%	0%	30%	40%
Westland		75%	NA	100%	NA	100%	NA	67%	NA	85%	NA
Woodvale		0%	50%	100%	20%	60%	75%	100%	50%	65%	49%
Average (%)		73%	50%	63%	26%	55%	33%	50%	18%	60%	32%
NAFL (Adult)	Brook	NA	25%	NA	60%	NA	75%	NA	0%	NA	40%
	Fullerton	NA	75%	NA	0%	NA	100%	NA	25%	NA	50%
	Grove	50%	75%	50%	0%	80%	100%	83%	25%	66%	50%
	Mallusk	83%	33%	92%	0%	93%	42%	33%	17%	75%	23%
	Strangford Av	50%	NA	75%	NA	80%	NA	33%	NA	60%	NA
	Wedderburn	25%	75%	50%	0%	40%	75%	0%	25%	29%	44%
	Average (%)	61%	57%	67%	12%	73%	78%	37%	18%	60%	41%

Table of Pitch Usage

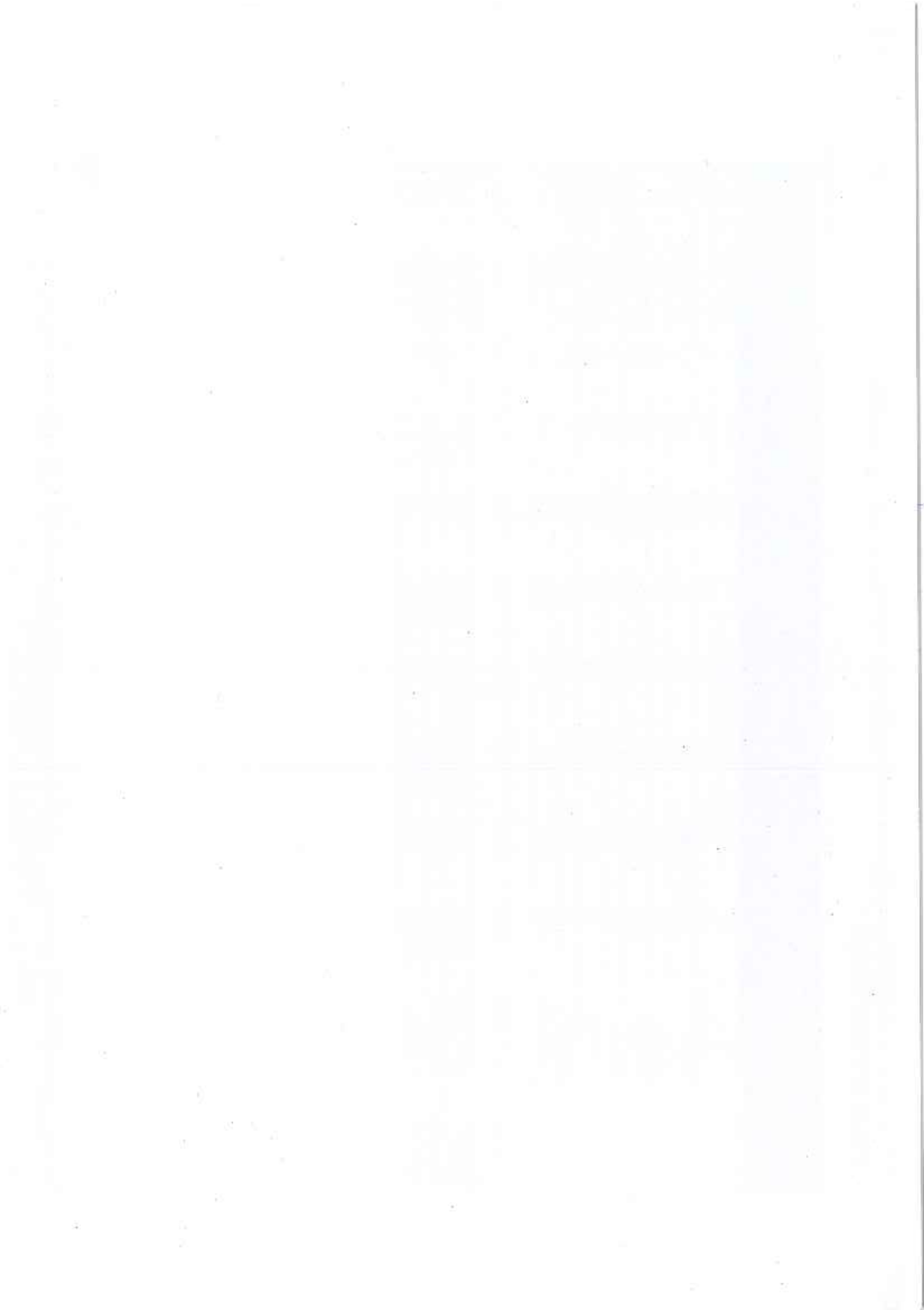
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League	Pitch Site	% usage Sep 14	% usage Sep 15	% usage Oct 14	% usage Oct 15	% usage Nov 14	% usage Nov 15	% usage Dec 14	% usage Dec 15	Average % usage Sept 14 to Dec 14	Average % usage Sept 15 to Dec 15
NIFL (Adult)	Blanchflower	0%	75%	50%	80%	60%	50%	67%	25%	44%	58%
	Grove	75%	0%	100%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%
	Mallusk	50%	NA	25%	NA	0%	NA	0%	NA	19%	NA
	Average (%)	42%	38%	58%	40%	28%	25%	22%	13%	38%	29%
SAFL (Adult)	Ballysillian	25%	25%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	11%	6%
	Blanchflower	NA	0%	NA	40%	NA	63%	NA	63%	NA	41%
	Brook	NA	25%	NA	60%	NA	25%	NA	25%	NA	34%
	Fullerton	NA	0%	NA	0%	NA	25%	NA	25%	NA	13%
	Victoria	100%	25%	25%	0%	20%	13%	50%	0%	49%	9%
	Wedderburn	25%	75%	50%	0%	80%	25%	67%	25%	56%	31%
	Average (%)	63%	25%	25%	17%	40%	25%	39%	23%	42%	22%
LBJL (Youth)	Fullerton	No data	88%	No data	0%	No data	19%	No data	0%	No data	27%
IFA (Youth)	Blanchflower	No data	100%	No data	0%	No data	190%	No data	0%	No data	73%
	King George	No data	0%	No data	0%	No data	0%	No data	0%	No data	0%
NIBFA (Youth)	Mallusk	No data	60%	No data	0%	No data	13%	No data	0%	NA	18%
SBYL (Youth)	Ballysillian	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Blanchflower	100%	NA	100%	NA	50%	NA	83%	NA	83%	NA
	Boucher Rd	93%	0%	89%	47%	80%	42%	89%	17%	88%	26%
	Brook	NA	25%	NA	90%	NA	38%	NA	38%	NA	48%
	Cherryvale	83%	25%	80%	133%	93%	50%	56%	0%	78%	52%

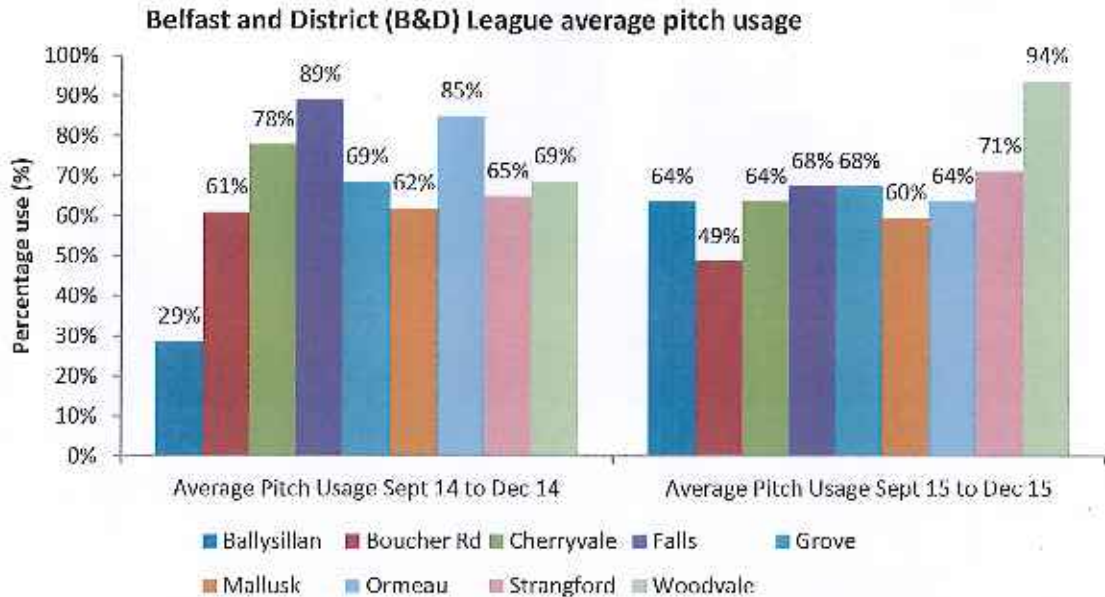
Table of Pitch Usage

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League	Pitch Site	% usage Sep 14	% usage Sep 15	% usage Oct 14	% usage Oct 15	% usage Nov 14	% usage Nov 15	% usage Dec 14	% usage Dec 15	Average % usage Sept 14 to Dec 14	Average % usage Sept 15 to Dec 15
	Grove	79%	43%	89%	0%	71%	89%	81%	46%	80%	45%
	King George	NA	0%	NA	0%	NA	0%	NA	0%	NA	0%
	Mallusk	83%	90%	79%	0%	50%	40%	42%	35%	64%	41%
	Ormeau	75%	25%	92%	0%	73%	17%	11%	33%	63%	19%
	Strangford	100%	100%	100%	0%	50%	69%	33%	38%	81%	52%
	Victoria	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	13%	0%	0%	0%	16%
	Wedderburn	0%	25%	25%	0%	10%	13%	0%	25%	9%	16%
	Woodvale	0%	38%	63%	0%	40%	13%	17%	25%	30%	19%
	Average (%)	56%	35%	65%	23%	51%	32%	37%	21%	52%	28%
Corrymeela FC	Blanchflower	100%	100%	100%	100%	60%	25%	67%	0%	82%	56%
Vision FC	Blanchflower	No data	50%	No data	80%	No data	25%	No data	0%	No data	39%
Stranmillis FC	Blanchflower	No data	75%	No data	0%	No data	75%	No data	25%	No data	44%
Shorts FC	Strangford	No data	0%	No data	0%	No data	0%	No data	0%	No data	0%



Graphs of Pitch Usage

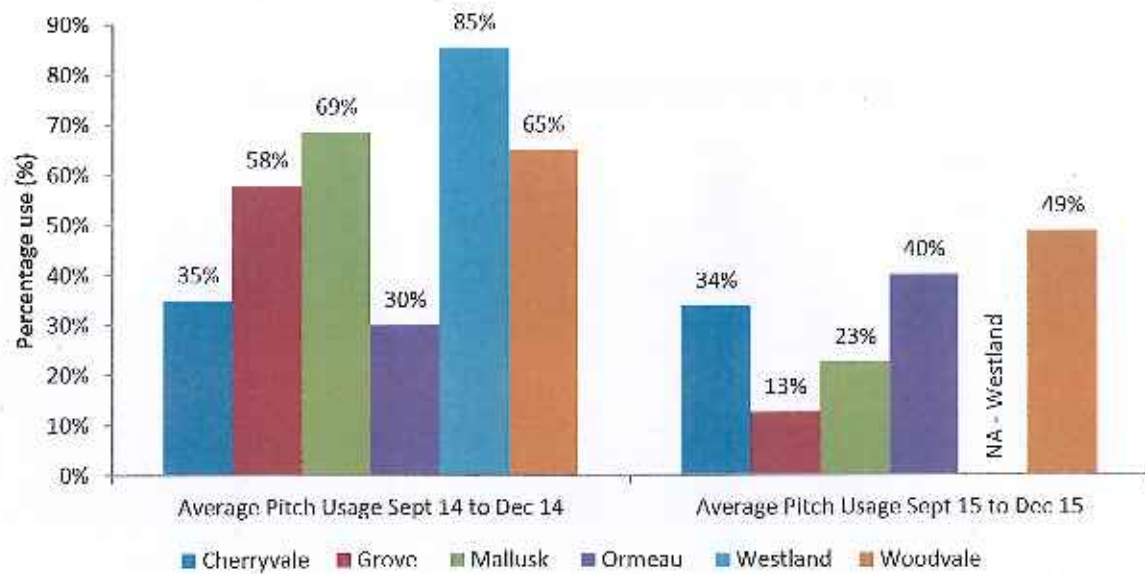


Comments

- ❖ Belfast and District has a total allocation of 23 pitches over 9 sites; its average pitch usage is, on the whole, well over 50% for both time periods.
- ❖ The lowest pitch usage of 29% is recorded for Ballysillan Playing Fields for Sept to Dec 2014; this increases to 64% for the same time period in 2015.
- ❖ Belfast and District's highest pitch usage is Woodvale Playing Fields for Sept 15 to Dec 15 at 94% of its allocation.

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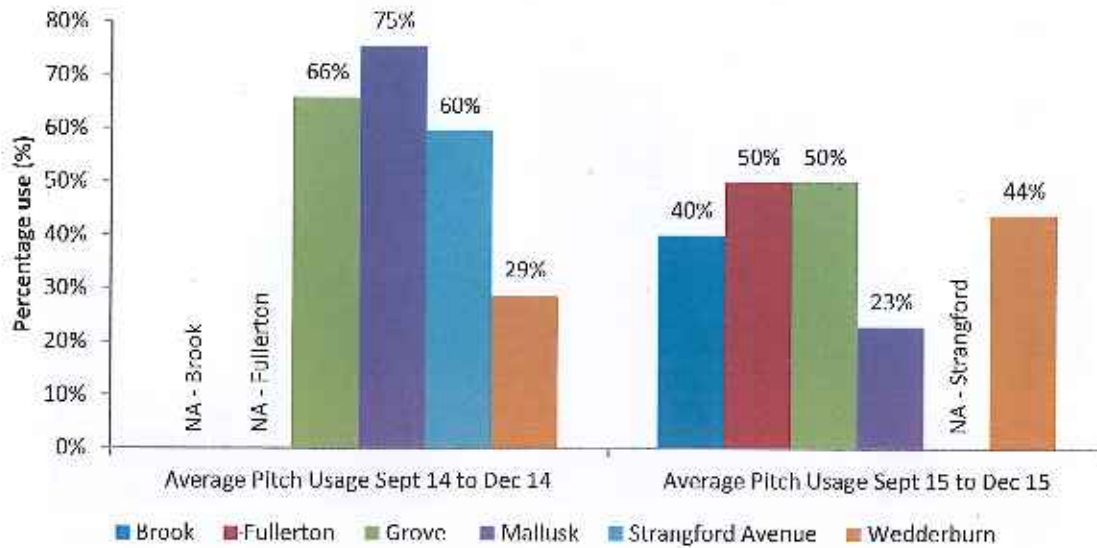
Boy's Brigade Old Boys (BBOB) League average pitch usage



Comments

- ❖ Overall pitch usage by BBOB is significantly less in 2015 compared to 2014, indicating that the League is decreasing in size (the League is reported to be folding at the end of the 2015/16 season)
- ❖ The highest pitch usage by BBOB is for Westlands Playing Fields in 2014 – due to multiple requests for Westlands Playing Fields it was not allocated to any League in the 2015/16 season.

Northern Amateur Football League (NAFL) average pitch usage

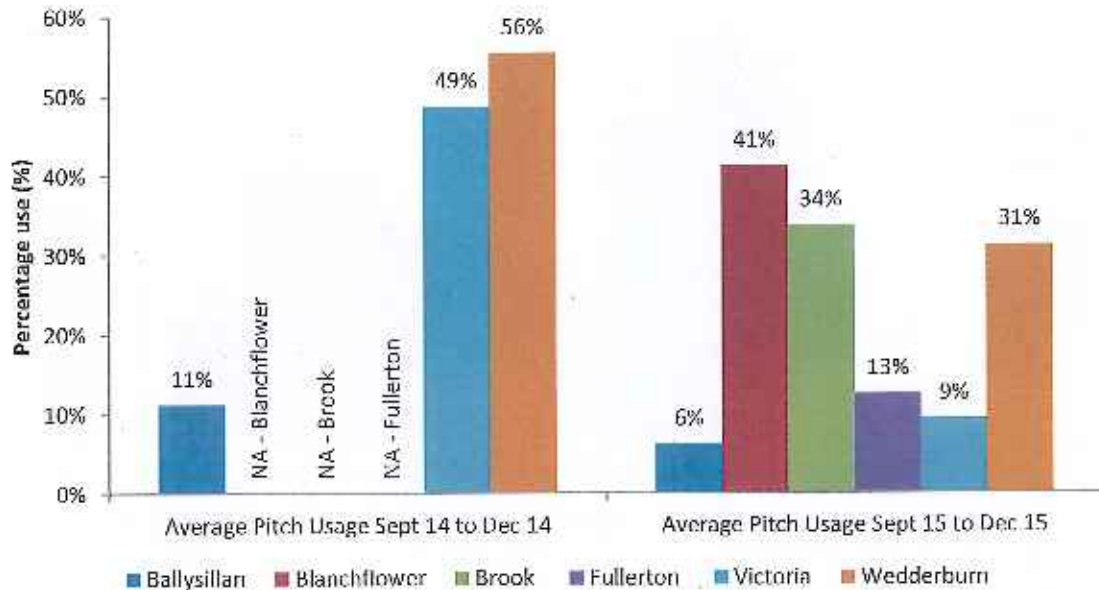


Comments

- ❖ NAFL's pitch usage as presented from September to December 2015 is at or below 50% for all sites, perhaps indicating over-allocation.
- ❖ With Local Government Reform, NAFL's pitch allocation now includes the Brook and Fullerton Park. This may explain the large decrease in usage of Mallusk Playing Fields from 75% in 2014 to just 23% in 2015.

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South Antrim Football League average pitch usage

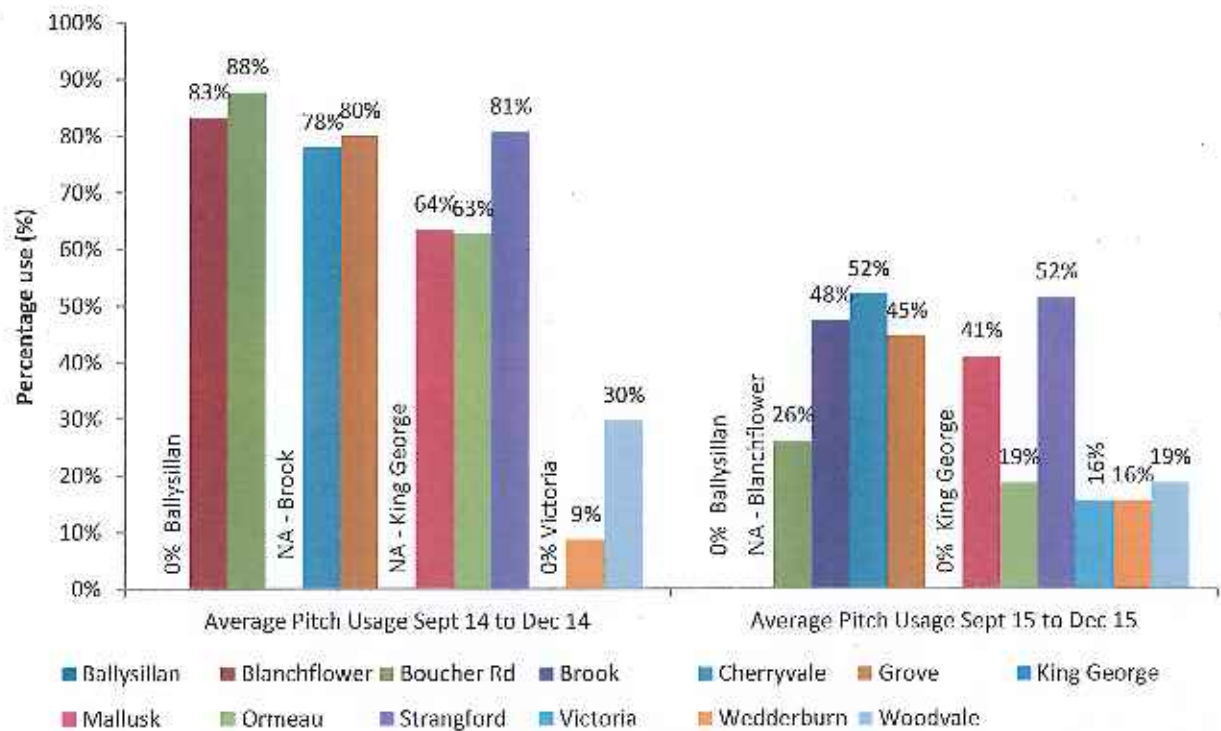


Comments

- ❖ SAFL's pitch allocation is confined to 3 sites in 2014 – this doubles to 6 sites in 2015 due to bookings at Blanchflower Playing Fields as well as Local Government Reform allowing the Brook and Fullerton Park to become available.
- ❖ Pitch usage by SAFL across all 6 sites in Sept 15 to Dec 15 is well below 50%, perhaps indicating over-allocation.

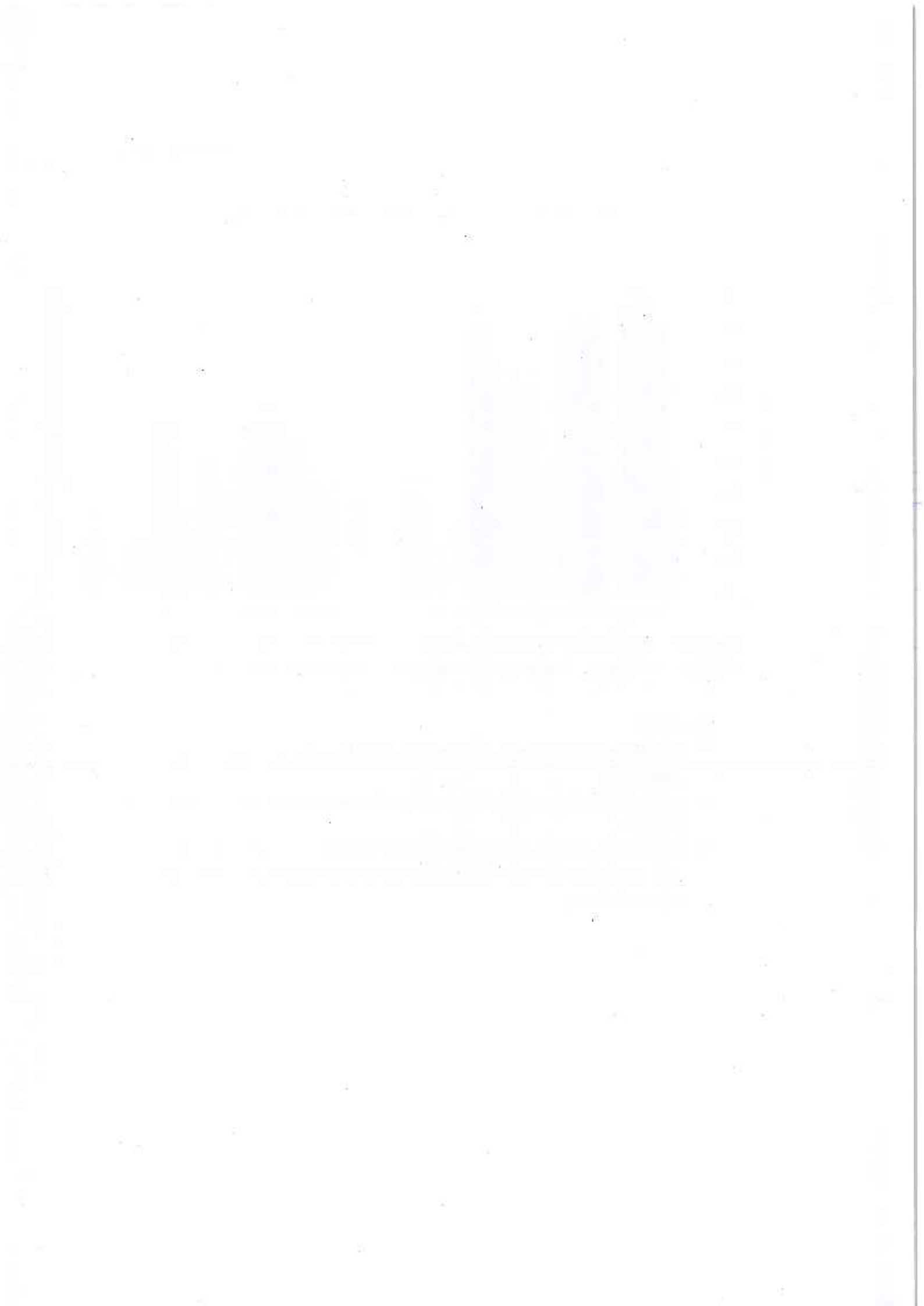
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South Belfast Youth League (SBYL) average pitch usage



Comments

- ❖ SBYL has the largest pitch allocation of all the Leagues at 44 pitches across 12 sites in 2015.
- ❖ Neither Ballysillan nor King George V sites were used in 2015- the reason for this is unclear.
- ❖ Overall, SBYL average pitch usage appears to be lower in 2015 compared to 2014 – this may in part be due to the recent extended period of wet weather affecting match scheduling.



Leagues' Survey

The first two questions captured the respondent's name, League, respondents' role and contact details. Responses together with comments to the remaining 11 questions are presented in the following tables:-

Question 3:- To what extent does Belfast City Council's current allocation process for Grass Soccer Pitches work for your League?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Works very well	62.5%	5
Works	37.5%	3
Doesn't work	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		0
	answered question	8
	skipped question	0

Comment: - 100% of respondents replied that the allocation process either 'Works very well' or 'works'.

Question 4:- Do you find the allocation process to be flexible when required?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, flexible	87.5%	7
No, not flexible	12.5%	1
Could you please comment further on your response?		7
	answered question	8
	skipped question	0

Comment: - Just one respondent replied that the current allocation process is not flexible.

The following 7 comments were recorded in question 4:-

- *"As long time stakeholders we find very little to complain about re the allocation system. Geography is a problem, however we are not alone in this issue with all of our clubs having to travel extensively."*
- *"Any pitch called off during the week, the guys contact us and help us with another location if possible."*
- *"Our League only requires the usage of 1 pitch to be used by 2 teams. We currently*

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have access to pitch 5 at Blanchflower Playing Fields in Belfast. If there is a problem with the pitch with regard to adverse weather conditions then we are usually given the option of an alternative venue."

- "Fullerton Park was a pitch used by SBYFL but was given to the Lisburn League even though there were enough local teams in our League to use it."
- "It should be noted that as a League we only agree to include clubs into our account with the Council if they enter the League with a nominated allocated ground."
- "Staff are willing to make late changes to teams and kick off time within the range of our allocated booking times."
- "I find dealing with Leona regards the booking of pitches at Fullerton Park a pleasure. My only concern would be the general maintenance of pitches i.e. pitch 2 is very rarely playable and it seems that teams and referees are being told that it is not the attendant's job to put out corner flags and peg down nets."

Question 5:- Please tell us about challenges, if any, that your League currently may have with Belfast City Council's Grass Soccer Pitch allocation process.

answered question	7
skipped question	1

The following 7 comments were recorded in question 5:

- "Some pitches are in very poor repair and we have no power to affect the situation if a particular pitch is allocated to us."
- "No problem with the allocation process. I find the staff does a great job."
- "A major issue for us is that the current changing facility at Blanchflower Playing Fields is not adequate. Our teams are having to share a single changing room which is not an acceptable practice in terms of Health and Safety, Child welfare issues etc."
- "Blanchflower mid-week is being used for training; it should only be used for matches."
- "As things are the system works well for Corrymeela FC and the other users in our League. However the Down Area Winter Football League does not deal directly with Belfast City Council because so few Belfast based teams use BCC pitches. The Club secretaries deal directly with the Council. This has been the case since before I became secretary of Corrymeela FC around 1998 (I think this procedure has been in place since about 1994). The current system works very well for us and the other teams in our League. There was a move by BCC during the summer to force the DAWFL to take over pitch allocation/payment duties, a move the DAWFL refused to undertake. The DAWFL has stated it will not move on this position. BCC had stated last summer the current system would remain in place for 2015/16 however would be reviewed in the summer of 2016. If the decision is to stop dealing directly with Club secretaries then Corrymeela FC, a direct BCC customer for over 20 years, and

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indirectly since its formation in 1988, will be adversely affected."

- *"Not so much with the allocation but with grass, it is increasingly difficult to plan a League programme based solely on the use of grass pitches. Obviously due to weather conditions."*
- *"No problem with it."*

Comment: - Overall there are few challenges with the allocation process – DAWL however would very much like pitches allocation to continue through their clubs as has been the case for over 20 years.

Question 6:- Please tell us about any improvements or changes to the current pitch allocation process that your League would suggest.

<i>answered question</i>	8
<i>skipped question</i>	0

Eight responses were received for question 6 as presented below:-

- *"I am quite happy with the current situation."*
- *"Possibly an email to the League secretaries stating who the "on call" person is for the weekend. Sometimes I think they are inundated with calls and are not able to answer they're (sic) phones to League secretaries like myself. They should not take calls from teams as this can lead to mis-information being passed about. In my opinion the on call personnel should have a list of secretaries that they can contact."*
- *"In terms of pitch allocation we currently have no issues."*
- *"None required to present system."*
- *"Our League would have a nominal use of 12 pitches over two allocation times 6 per allocation so the numbers match our requirements and we are happy with the process. I do however think that affordable 3G facilities provided by the council would be a sensible investment."*
- *"Happy with the way it works."*
- *"Leagues using most pitches and paying for most should be given preference."*
- *"League should receive some payment for the secretarial work carried out by League staff."*

Comment: - Six out of the eight respondents do not have any suggestions for improvements to the allocation process although some do make other operational suggestions. One respondent would like to see allocation weighted in favour of those Leagues already with the largest allocation, whilst another notes the extra administration cost to the Leagues in allocating and booking pitches for their teams.

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Questions 7, 8, and 9 asked if Leagues endorse 3G pitches for matches and training.

<i>answered question</i>	8
<i>skipped question</i>	0

Comment: - All respondents answered 'Yes' to endorsing 3G pitches.

Question 10. Does your League currently book 3G pitches in Belfast, either with the Council or another provider?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	43%	3
No	57%	4
<i>answered question</i>		7
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Comment: - 3 out of the 8 respondents record booking 3G facilities in Belfast

Question 11. If yes to question 10 which 3G pitches does your League book?

<i>answered question</i>	4
<i>skipped question</i>	3

The following responses paint a picture of the 3G facilities being used by the Leagues and DAWL clubs:-

- *"Rathmore School, Aquinas School, Ashfield School, Hanwood Centre, The Hammer, Whiterock, Olympia, Brook Activity Centre."*
- *"The League doesn't book pitches in Belfast. However Corrymeela FC uses the 3G pitch at Ashfield High School, Holywood Road, for training on a Monday (1 hour) and Wednesday (2 hours) each week from September to March."*
- *"From senior clubs with such facilities."*
- *"Queen's Sport Upper Malone Road, Cliftonville FC Solitude, Crusaders FC Seaview."*

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Question 12. How often does your League book 3G pitches for matches in Belfast?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Weekly	28.6%	2
Once a month	0.0%	0
Less than once a month	0.0%	0
Never	71.4%	5
Other (please specify)		1
<i>answered question</i>		7
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Q13. We invite you to make any further comments you may find relevant over and above the information you have kindly given us.

<i>answered question</i>	4
<i>skipped question</i>	3

The following 4 comments were recorded in the final question:-

- *"The separation of services with the introduction of GLL has not in my opinion been good for Junior Soccer in Belfast. BCC managed perfectly well for many years and now the system is very weak with no one appearing accountable to stakeholders."*
- *"All 3G pitches - never available. Always booked up."*
- *"If the system currently used for DAWFL users is changed this will have a direct effect on these Clubs. Corrymeela FC would either be classed as a casual user and have to book the left over pitches on a weekly basis (not have an established home pitch) or relocate to another Council area. Neither of these is a route the Club wishes to have to take. We have been based at Blanchflower, Holywood Road, and before then Inverary Avenue, since we joined the DAWFL in 1990."*

QUESTION

1. A company has a total of 100 employees. The number of employees in each department is given in the following table:

Department	Number of Employees
Department A	25
Department B	30
Department C	15
Department D	10
Department E	10

2. The company is planning to hire 20 new employees. The number of employees in each department after hiring is given in the following table:

Department	Number of Employees
Department A	35
Department B	40
Department C	25
Department D	15
Department E	15

3. The company is planning to lay off 10 employees. The number of employees in each department after laying off is given in the following table:

Department	Number of Employees
Department A	15
Department B	20
Department C	5
Department D	0
Department E	10

4. The company is planning to hire 10 new employees and lay off 5 employees. The number of employees in each department after hiring and laying off is given in the following table:

Department	Number of Employees
Department A	25
Department B	30
Department C	15
Department D	10
Department E	10

ANSWER

1. The total number of employees is 100. The number of employees in each department is given in the following table:

Department	Number of Employees
Department A	25
Department B	30
Department C	15
Department D	10
Department E	10

2. The company is planning to hire 20 new employees. The number of employees in each department after hiring is given in the following table:

Department	Number of Employees
Department A	35
Department B	40
Department C	25
Department D	15
Department E	15

Leagues' Focus Group

Topic 1 – Pitch Allocation Process	Responses/Comments
<p>1. Tell us about the current grass soccer pitch allocation process with Belfast City Council – what does it involve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leagues/Clubs complete a Council pitch booking form sent to the Leagues in June prior to start of the season. • Council confirms pitch allocation to Leagues and clubs by July. • Council and Leagues meet in July on a weekday at 5pm – Leagues noted that this time is too early to attend – prefer a later start. • Council has the final decision on pitch allocation; unclear if there is an appeals process. • Each League only made aware of their own allocation – they would like to see more transparency in the allocation procedure and would like to know which pitches have been allocated to other Leagues – i.e. master plan of pitch bookings made available to all. • Most Leagues unaware that five Down Area Winter League clubs book and are allocated pitches directly from the Council. • Corrymeela FC report booking pitches directly from the Council since the early 1990s. • NAFL noted Council Minutes dating approx. 40 years ago obligating pitch bookings to be made only by League secretaries in order to mitigate pitch disputes by clubs at that time.
<p>2. Is the current pitch allocation process working well - are there any changes/improvements you would like to see?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SBYL report they don't receive a large enough pitch allocation to accommodate all their fixtures – they also book Lisburn Castlereagh and Antrim Newtownabbey pitches. • B&D has been booking pitches by the same process for 20 years and have no issues. • NAFL, SAFL, NIBFA, LYIL, DAWL and Corrymeela FC report they are reasonably happy with the current process. Although when asked if the other Leagues felt it was equitable to allow DAWL clubs to book pitches directly from the Council the general consensus was 'No'. • DAWL secretary noted strongly they did not want to act as an agent for the club pitch bookings for the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Extra time required ○ Extra volunteer staff required ○ Insurance – concerned that the League would be liable for the teams' use of Council pitches • NAFL noted Belfast City Council is the only Council where they must book pitches on behalf of the clubs; this places an extra administrative, insurance and legal burden on the League. NAFL has an agreement (under legal advice) between the League and clubs ensuring the League is not liable or responsible for clubs' use of the pitches.

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<p>3. Do Leagues/clubs use all their pitch allocation - if not tell us why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Leagues report they don't use all allocation due to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pitch quality/condition due to weather 2. Fixtures where teams are playing away matches, for example in Cup matches – dependent on team draws • Belfast City Council Match Updates/Cancellations Hotline All Leagues noted the current Council match updates/cancellations Hotline is not fit for purpose; the following points were recorded:- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hotline is available for teams (as well as leagues) to call – leads to confusion. 2. Hotline information seems to change from Friday pm to Saturday am to Saturday pm – <i>“on a number of occasions teams have arrived at a pitch to be told the pitch is unplayable – it's too late, referees still have to be paid at this point.”</i> 3. Due to the perceived inconsistency with Hotline information, NIBFA will look to use other non-Council pitches when weather looks poor – the League has found the availability of Belfast City Council pitches unreliable in poor weather conditions compared with other Councils. • Leagues would like to see the following:- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pitch inspection carried out on Friday morning; this together with knowledge of weather forecast would allow a decision to be made on whether pitches are playable on Saturday. 2. The decision on pitch playability on Saturdays only to be made available to League secretaries (and teams who have booked directly) possibly through a password-protected website area or automated text message service. 3. The decision on pitch playability should not be changed after 12 noon Friday even if the weather is fine on Saturday. • There was general consensus that pitches are closed too early for the end of the season – due to the recent long running poor weather Leagues anticipate a backlog of un-played matches. They would like to see pitches open until the end of May.
<p>4. Is there general support for Leagues continuing to book pitches to accommodate fixtures? What about clubs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are different opinions on Leagues continuing to book on behalf of clubs. • The youth Leagues clearly would like to continue booking pitches on behalf of teams. They feel this will ensure that pitches are booked and games played – they are happy to act on behalf of youth teams. • NAFL would prefer not to book pitches on behalf of their adult teams but will continue with present system. • DAWL do not currently book Belfast City Council pitches on behalf of their teams; their 5 Belfast based teams book pitches directly from the Council/GLL and they would like this arrangement to continue. • SAFL are happy to continue as present. • B&D are happy to continue as present.

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Topic 2 - Home Pitches	Responses/Comments
<p>1. How are 'Home' pitches assigned? What if more than 2 teams request the same 'Home' pitch?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The youth Leagues don't have home and away games - the majority of games are played on Belfast pitches for SBYL and Lisburn pitches for the LJIL. • B&D – assign home pitches at their discretion taking into account where the team is based, historical preference by team and team conduct - home pitch is assigned at the discretion of the League committee. • NAFL – only allow a team to join the League if it already has a home pitch secured – the League does not in any way help a team secure a home pitch. • DAWL – does not assign home pitches – clubs secure these through the Council.
<p>2. How do Leagues deal with a new pitch becoming available – is there a process for assigning 'Home' team/s for a new pitch?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No clear rationale given. • The current Westlands pitch allocation was raised at this point. Leagues reflected that this is a Council issue and not for the Leagues to deal with. • NAFL noted that 92nd Old Boys FC have historically played out of the Westlands pitch, and are in favour of this continuing. In addition NAFL reported 2 teams in their League requested help in securing Westlands pitch as their home venue – NAFL responded it was beyond the remit of the League to become involved; it is a matter for the clubs and Council.
<p>3. What about new teams who have just joined the League – how are they assigned a pitch (Home or otherwise)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NAFL – team must come with a 'Home' pitch already secured. • B&D – at discretion of the League. • SAFL – at discretion of the League. • DAWL – club secures home pitch. <p>Youth Leagues – assign from their allocated pitches, dependent on team home base and fixture.</p>
<p>4. How do Leagues assign a pitch which has been upgraded to Amateur League status?</p>	<p>NAFL report it is the club's responsibility to secure an Amateur League standard pitch.</p>

APPENDIX 4

Topic 3 - 3G Pitches and Final Comments	Responses/Comments
1. How do you see further availability and development of 3G pitches affecting fixture scheduling and pitch allocation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SBYL keen to book and use 3G pitches to accommodate mid-week fixtures – report they have approximately 40 Friday night match fixtures every week.• NAFL note there is an increasing recognition among the clubs for flexibility in fixtures – they report that 5.00pm kick-off times are acceptable if that is the only time a 3G pitch is available.• Noted by all Leagues that 3G facilities are consistently more expensive than grass pitches and as such are often beyond the ability of teams and clubs to afford on a regular basis.
2. Any final comments/questions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Floodlit grass pitches at Ballysillan and Loughside should only be used for the provision of midweek matches – current midweek training by NIFL teams under lights does allow enough time for the pitch to recover for Saturday junior and senior matches.• Pitch maintenance contractors sometimes cut the grass when pitches are too wet – resultant tractor tracks can sometimes be deep, and lead to damage preventing games for a number of weeks.