Bowls Needs Assessment
Longsight Bowls Club



Updated November 2024

Prepared on behalf of Views (Holdings) Limited
By Sports Planning Consultants

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1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Views (Holdings) Limited are proposing the development of Longsight Bowls Club, which is located within the Longsight area in the Manchester City Council boundaries.

1.1.2 The development of the facility will see the loss of a bowling green, which is located on the site. As the site contains a sports facility, the planning application will therefore be subject to national and local planning policy on sports facilities.

1.1.3 This report sets out the policy context impacting the loss of the bowling green and evaluates the adequacy of existing facilities for bowls across Manchester City Council and more specifically in the Longsight catchment area, in order to determine the implications for the planning application.

1.1.4 The assessment follows the approach set out in Sport England's guidance document, *Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guide (ANOG, 2013)* and considers:

- Strategic and policy context
- Background and context to the existing site
- Quantity of provision in the catchment area
- Quality of provision in the catchment area
- Accessibility of provision in the catchment area
- Implications for the proposal to develop the bowling green.

1.1.5 ANOG proposes the adoption of a proportionate approach to any needs assessment work, this report reflects that and the current level of usage and alternative provision in the area.

1.1.6 Longsight Bowls Club is located in the Central Area of the Manchester City Council Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS). This is considered first, and also updates the position since the PPOSS. It then considers a wider catchment surrounding the bowls club, in-line with advice from Manchester Active.

1.1.7 In assessing need and mitigation proposals Manchester Active adopt a catchment area of 20-minutes' walk or 20 cycling, in-line with Active Travel recommendations. Sport England's Active Places Power Catchment Profile tool was used to generate the outputs, as illustrated later. This equates to a catchment of 1-3 miles, which we have adopted for the wider analysis, this takes in other facilities outside the Central Area and across the border in neighbouring Stockport.

1.1.8 The initial needs assessment work was completed in May 2024 and presented to Manchester Active for comment. Fiona Pudge, Capital Development Manager at Manchester Active commented at the time:

'I agree the Bowling Green in this instance is surplus to requirement but there is a need to create capacity at Burnage Bowling Club to accommodate the additional members from Longsight. This is particularly as the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy identifies the existing green as poor quality and recommends improving the green quality. It should be noted that even where an individual site may be deemed to be surplus to requirement, strategic sport recommendations require qualitative improvements to similar sites within the locality to help address capacity and qualitative issues in that sport typology.

As advised during a previous pre application enquiry, Manchester Active would be supportive of the loss of the Longsight Bowling Green subject to:

- *A Feasibility Study of the mitigation site that sets out the works required, informed by an appropriate survey, and costs of the works. However, it is unclear how any contribution would be secured and delivered as Burnage Bowling Club is privately owned so would constitute a third party. The Council would have no role in delivering the mitigation unless the applicant entered into a Unilateral Undertaking to deliver the mitigation themselves.*

- *Written confirmation from Longsight Bowling Club that they are supportive of relocation especially as recent consultation carried out by Manchester Active indicated the club had an aspiration to increase maintenance and install sports lighting on their existing site if permitted.'*

This report, sets out updates since May 2024, progress on the actions set out by Manchester Active and the details of the agreed mitigation package. These are all set out in Section 4. The next sections reiterate the findings of the May 2024 study, updated where appropriate, to reflect changes since the early part of the year.

1.2 Background

Location and Boundaries

1.2.1 The proposed development site is the former Longsight Cricket Club. The location of the site is illustrated in Figure 1 and as set out, the site falls within the Central Area of Manchester City Council as defined by the Council's Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS).

Figure 1 – Longsight Bowls Club Location Plan



1.2.2 The Manchester City Council Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS) indicates that the site contains a bowling green. At the time of the PPOS (June 2022) the club was recorded as having 35 members. The PPOSS describes Longsight as having a standard quality green.

1.2.3 It was highlighted by the club that there is a need for new equipment to maintain the grass to a better standard. In addition, the length of grass, quality of ditches, overhanging trees and unofficial use were all cited as being problematic. The club highlighted a problem with moss growth on their greens. The club believes the problem has occurred due to lack of maintenance over the previous 18 months throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. They state the need for additional funding, better machinery and a stronger maintenance programme to ensure this problem can be reversed. Longsight BC also highlights ambition for sports lighting of the green; however the PPOSS notes, it has previously had problems with neighbours nearby when enquiring.

1.2.4 The site was identified as a low priority in the PPOSS, with recommendations to improve the green quality.

1.2.5 Since the PPOSS numbers have further dwindled and it was agreed that bowls on the site was no longer sustainable, members have happily re-located to other clubs in the catchment. This is set out in the attached letter requested by Manchester Active.

Usage

1.2.6 Longsight Cricket Club was founded in 1848, cricket stopped being played on the site in 2004, the site was subsequently developed in 2012, with mitigation for the loss of the cricket ground agreed and implemented in the area. The bowling section of Longsight Cricket Club continued and benefitted from an upgraded clubhouse and social facility as a result of the cricket club development. The social facility, which includes snooker, is now the driver of the club, as the bowls usage has dwindled in recent years.

1.2.7 For the 2023 season, Longsight entered 3 league teams, playing on a Tuesday evening, Wednesday afternoon and Wednesday evening. The club plays across 2 leagues; *Cheadle and Gatley District Bowling League and Stockport Park Bowling League.* Some members played in a number of the teams.

1.2.8 Since the PPOS was conducted, membership numbers have declined significantly and totaled just 11, in early 2024. From meetings with the club they explained, with the increasing struggles in membership numbers, for the 2023 season Longsight bowling players partnered with Burnage Village Bowling Club in order to be able to compete in the relevant leagues. Teams played across both sites under the Burnage Village Bowls Club banner, many of the remaining Longsight members also played on a Monday afternoon for Burnage Village last year. The 3 teams that Longsight run comprise of older generation representatives / or over 65s as they have found it hard to attract a younger audience. A number of the members play on all three of the teams,

1.2.9 The covid-19 pandemic had a big impact on bowls membership. Once all restrictions were lifted some members did not return whilst others retired from the sport altogether. The club has no recruitment plan to attract new members. The social side has also been impacted as the trend now is to play bowls and depart, rather than using the social club facilities, to illustrate this the overall membership of the social club was 193 in 2021, of which 14 were bowlers. In 2022 this had reduced to 182 social club members, with 11 were bowlers.

1.2.10 As a consequence of the recent challenges, the club has come under serious financial difficulty. Alongside the dwindling number of bowlers, the green is only used for 4 and a half months of the year but cost the club £5000 per year to maintain. The average takings per month from the bowling green equates to circa £150 per month.

1.2.11 Given this context, the decision was taken by the club to sell the bowling green as it was becoming increasingly unsustainable and a heavy burden on overall club finances. Given the lack of usage and initial migration of members to Burnage, the impacts were considered to be negligible, with Longsight members partnering with Burnage and now Beech House, thus resulting in negligible displacement. We spoke to Burnage Village Garden Bowling Club and they confirmed the current number of members in the early part of the year was 21. Given their low membership numbers the migration of the 11 members from Longsight to Burnage, or elsewhere, including the Beech House club, will support the sustainability of bowls in the area, without impacting negatively on capacity.

Structure of the Report

1.2.12 This report sets out the issues that need to be considered and the options available and is structured as follows:

- Section 2 – Policy Context
- Section 3 – Needs Assessment for Bowls in the Central Area across the catchment area – *Quality, Quantity, Accessibility and Availability*
- Section 4 – Summary and Conclusions.

2.0 Policy Context

National Planning Policy Guidance

2.1.1 National Planning Policy Guidance Paragraph 103 states that:

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

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

2.1.2 The former bowling green therefore falls under the above policy and compliance with one of the above exceptions will be necessary if loss of the bowling green is to be considered acceptable.

2.1.3 Building on the NPPF, Sport England has a statutory responsibility for planning applications involving playing fields and is also a non statutory consultee for applications involving all other sports facilities (including bowling greens). Sport England guidance states that:

'Even where wider sports facilities fall outside the definition of a playing field, they are afforded protection through the planning system under the provisions of paragraph 103 of the Governments National Planning Policy Framework.'

2.1.4 Sport England therefore seek to protect all sports facilities and will object to any applications that involve the loss of sports facilities without demonstrating a strong case meeting one of the exception criteria of Paragraph 103.

2.1.5 Given the facility in question is not playing field land, Sport England will be a non-statutory consultee on this application and bowling greens will be considered within this remit on a non-statutory basis.

2.1.6 This report seeks to provide evidence to support the proposed disposal of the site, in the context of the NPPF and to demonstrate a proportionate mitigation strategy, which recognises the site context and needs.

2.2 Manchester City Council Policy

Local Plan and Core Strategy

2.2.1 The Manchester City Council Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted on 11th July 2012. It is the key document in Manchester's Local Development Framework and covers a period of 15 years from 2012 to 2027. The Manchester City Local Plan is currently under review, although this is at very early stages. The Core Strategy (2012 – 2027) therefore sets the strategic context for development in Manchester.

2.2.2 The policies which are of particular relevance to playing fields are Core Strategy Policies EN9, EN10, EN11 and EN12, while Policy EN9 provides the overarching approach to green infrastructure in all its types and functions. Policy EN10 looks at how the city's open spaces should be safeguarded. Policy EN11 refers to how opportunities for new open space provision will be considered, whilst EN12 sets out priorities for improving quality across the city.

2.2.3 Policy EN10 is the key policy in relation to the proposed loss of sports provision. Specifically it notes that:

'Proposals will be supported that:

- *improve the quality and quantity of accessible open space, sport and recreation in the local area*
- *provide innovative solutions to improving the network of existing open spaces, increase accessibility to green corridors,*
- *and enhance biodiversity improve access to open space for disabled people.*

Proposals on existing open spaces and sport and recreation facilities will only be permitted where:

- *Equivalent or better replacement open space, sport or recreation facilities will be provided in the local area;*
- *or The site has been demonstrated to be surplus for its current open space, sport or recreation function and the City wide standards set out above are maintained, and*
- *it could not fulfil other unsatisfied open space, sport or recreation needs,*
- *and a proposed replacement will remedy a deficiency in another type of open space, sport or recreation facility in the local area;*

  or The development will be ancillary to the open space, sport or recreation facility and complement the use or character.'

2.2.4 The key consideration and evidence base in assessing the policy exceptions is the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy (PPOSSS). This document provides an evidence base for decision making relating to playing pitch provision across an area and provides an understanding of the

balance between the local supply of, and demand for, playing pitches and sports facilities. Sport England typically require a playing pitch strategy to be updated every 3 – 5 years, depending upon the level of monitoring of the strategy that has been undertaken. MCC's current PPS was published in June 2022, this means that it represents an up to date picture of the adequacy of provision to meet current and projected future demand.

Manchester City Council Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (POSS) 2022

2.2.5 The Manchester City Council PPOSS was prepared in November 2022 and considers the adequacy of facilities for football, cricket, hockey, rugby union and league, tennis, athletics, golf, and of course bowls. There is also a smaller section on American football, lacrosse, Gaelic sports, softball and baseball, MUGA and 3G pitches.

2.2.6 The 2022 PPS seeks to deliver the following vision:

'To be a City recognised for its high quality of life, with a network of quality, accessible and sustainable green spaces and world-class sports, leisure and playing pitch facilities, which offer inclusive services to all and capable of supporting sport, health and wellbeing of all residents across their life course; enabling the inactive to become active and more residents to fulfil their potential by participating in sport and physical activity, thus improving their long-term health and well-being.'

2.2.7 There are 3 aims, namely:

- **Aim 1**
  *To **protect** the existing supply of outdoor sports facilities where it is needed for meeting current and future need*
- **Aim 2**
  *To **enhance** outdoor sports facilities and ancillary facilities through improving quality and management of sites*
- **Aim 3**
  *To **provide** new outdoor sports facilities where there is current or future demand to do so.*

2.2.8 The PPOSSS splits the city into distinct analysis areas (North, Central, South and Wynthenshawe). The assessment presents a picture of adequacy in each of the four parts of the city and site-by-site action plans are also provided for each area.

Bowls

2.2.9 In terms of bowls the PPOSS made the following summary conclusions in relation to outdoor Bowls in Manchester. *There is currently sufficient capacity for both crown and flat bowling greens to meet both current and future demand for each format*.

2.2.10 There are 31 bowling greens in Manchester located across 26 sites. Across the City there are 11 sites with a total 12 disused greens. Of the active greens, ten are owned and managed by user clubs, 19 managed by the Council and two owned by private pubs and managed by their user clubs.

2.2.11 There are 18 greens rated as good quality, nine as standard quality and four as poor quality. Nine greens are serviced by sports lighting.

2.2.12 There are 25 bowling clubs playing in Manchester, with known membership totalling 791 members. There are 12 responding clubs which report having seen a reduction in membership over recent years, whereas three have experienced an increase. Of responding clubs, 14 aspire to increase membership.

2.2.13 Of the 21 responding clubs 14 highlight aspirations to increase membership. As 67% of responding clubs are willing to accept new members, it is considered that any future and latent demand can be accommodated at clubs and greens already in existence. There are five bowling clubs with 20 members of fewer which require support to ensure that they remain viable despite a low membership base.

2.2.14 The PPOSS therefore considers there is currently sufficient capacity for both crown and flat bowling greens to meet both current and future demand for each format. Alstom, Cringlewood, Fitzroy Social, Francis Shaw and Simpson Memorial bowling clubs require support to ensure that they remain viable owing to the low membership base. Longsight is now in the category since the PPOSS.

2.2.15 Conversely, Lloyd Hotel BC, Northern Etchells BC and Withington BC are noted as operating at or above recommended capacity levels and therefore need to be monitored to ensure that supply remains adequate. There may be a need for these clubs to access a second green elsewhere to meet demand in future. Of the 21 responding clubs 14 highlight aspirations to increase membership.

2.2.16 Specific to the Central area, where Longsight is located, the PPOS found that currently there is spare capacity for bowls greens as well as there being spare future capacity. According to the PPOS there are 5 crown green sites in the central area however one at Crowcroft Park is now disused, having been taken out of commission by Manchester City Council since the publication of the PPOSS and converted into a memorial garden, it is assumed this was based on the lack of need.

2.2.17 Of the 4 remaining sites, 2 contain double greens, making a total of 6 greens. Greenbank Park also formally had 2 greens but one has been taken out of commission, again this is assumed

to be as a result of lack of demand. All greens in the area were rated as good quality with Longsight being rated as standard quality.

2.2.18 A monitoring report of the PPOSS was produced in December 2023, which provided an updated picture. In terms of bowls, it noted that there had been a reduction from 31 to 30 greens, with the closure of Openshaw AEU Bowling Green. There are 12 disused bowling greens across the city. Mitigation has been secured at Highbank Bowling Club for the loss of Openshaw. Despite this change the position remains one of sufficient supply to meet demand, as part of the updated position.

Manchester City Council Strategic Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (July 2009)

2.2.19 Manchester completed its Strategic Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study in July 2009, in line with the Government advice in PPG17 and the Companion Guide. This found that open spaces are highly valued by Manchester residents, enriching both their lives and those visitors to the city, and it reinforced the importance of retaining, managing, enhancing and adapting existing sites, complemented by the creation of new areas of open space. The study set local standards for all types of open space, sport and recreation provision. The application of these standards across the city allows an understanding of where there are critical issues relating to both existing provision and the new for new provision.

2.2.20 The study set maximum of a 15-minute walk time to the nearest grass pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens for Manchester residents. This has been updated more recently by Manchester Active who give a 20-minute walk time, we have taken into consideration both, in the needs assessment set out below.

2.2.21 It is clear therefore that local policy reflects the principles of national planning policy, which seek to protect existing open spaces and sports facilities.

2.2.22 Alongside land use planning policies, there are also a series of sport specific strategies, which provide further context for the consideration of Longsight BC.

Indoor Bowls Needs Assessment – November 2023

2.2.23 Manchester Active have recently completed a feasibility study and consultation exercise int the feasibility of developing an indoor bowls centre in Manchester. The study, conducted with key stakeholders identified that there is not an indoor bowls centre within Manchester. Whilst there are three indoor centres located just outside of Manchester, none of these currently affiliate to the EIBA and therefore cannot host affiliated competitions. The centre at Swinton Pool Hall is also too small to comply with EIBA competition regulations. Based on this all of the

stakeholders consulted agreed that there would be sufficient demand for an indoor bowls centre within Manchester, with demand coming from flat green, crown green and short mat bowlers in Manchester and beyond.

2.2.24 Despite the report being well received by the city council it was decided not to proceed with the project, given the likely operational deficit.

Manchester's Sport and Physical Activity Strategy 2019 – 2028

2.2.25 Manchester Active (brand name MCRactive) is a not-for-profit organisation established and overseen by the City Council. It is responsible for driving sport and physical activity across Manchester and encouraging all residents to adopt a more active and healthy lifestyle.

2.2.26 The strategy was developed by Manchester Active in 2019 and is underpinned by an extensive public consultation and sets out 7 key themes for improving physical activity in the city.

Bowls Development Alliance – We Are Bowls 2022 - 2027

2.2.27 Outdoor bowls in Manchester is played on crown greens (as opposed to flat greens), with a typical season running in the Summer from May until October. The British Crown Green Bowling Association (BCGBA) is the National Governing Body (NGB) with overall responsibility for ensuring effective governance of the sport.

2.2.28 This 5-year strategy was developed in collaboration with Bowls England, the English Indoor Bowling Association, British Crown Green Bowling Association, English Short Mat Bowling Association and Disability Bowls England. The intention of the strategy is to set out a clear vision, purpose and objectives to inform the future development of the sport. The strategy has 4 key themes as follows:

1. Partnerships and communities

Ambition:

to ensure the role in the bowls family preserves the important connection with partners and key stakeholders through the continuation of shared goals and objectives, aligning to the organisation's vision of transforming bowls into an accessible sport for all.

2. Educate and empower

Ambition:

To increase the impact had on tackling inequalities through a more connected and educated volunteer workforce who fully support efforts at a local level and who represent a younger, more diverse group of people, ensuing the sport has sustainability into the future.

3. Diversify and innovate

Ambition:

To continue to take the lead on driving inclusion with the view to improving the culture of the sport through more inclusive and innovative practices on the ground, linking into the whole sport inclusion strategy.

4. Sustain and Grow

Ambition
To ensure there are tried and tested sustainability plans in place to recruit and retain volunteers and grow participation at clubs, working closely with the wider network to broaden reach and influence.

2.3 Strategic Context Summary

2.3.1 A review of the strategic context therefore clearly demonstrates that national and local policy seeks to protect sports facilities from development unless an assessment is carried out that identifies the site as surplus to requirements and no longer needed.

2.3.2 This means that if proposals are to be policy compliant, at least one of the exception criteria from national and local planning documents must be met.

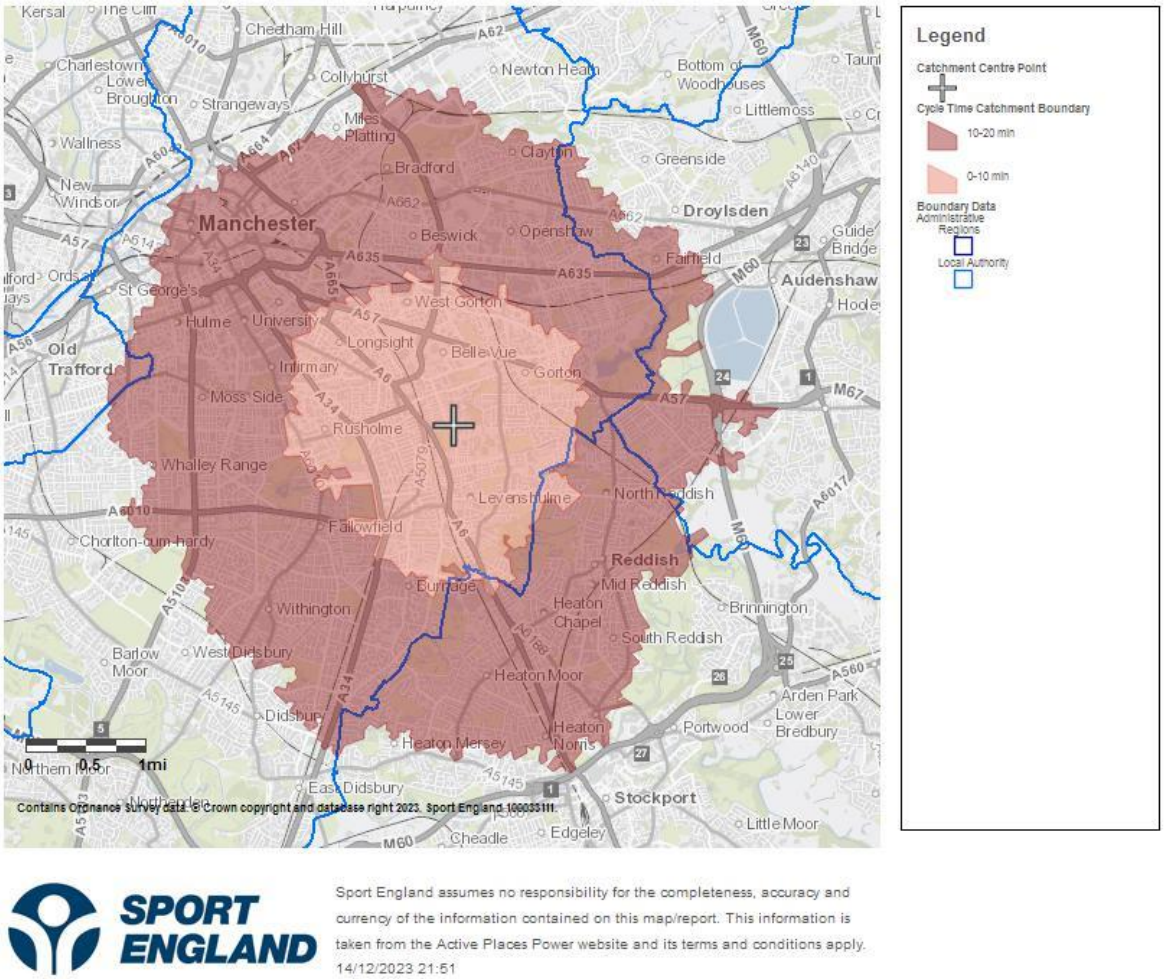
2.3.3 Section 3 therefore provides an assessment of supply and demand for bowls across the Central Area and the 20-minute catchment, while section 4 considers the implications of the assessment for proposals to develop on the Longsight bowling green, thus applying the overall assessment to the Longsight site.

3.0 Bowls Needs Assessment across the Longsight catchment

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This section assesses the supply and demand of bowls greens adopting a number of scenarios. Firstly we have considered needs within the Central Analysis Area. We have then considered the wider catchment, accepting that the Central Area is a function of presentation, this includes provision in the north and south analysis areas, plus provision in neighbouring Stockport. This is illustrated on the map below. The more outlying areas are not considered to be viable alternatives for current Longsight users.

Map 3.1 – Longsight Catchment Area



Sport England assumes no responsibility for the completeness, accuracy and currency of the information contained on this map/report. This information is taken from the Active Places Power website and its terms and conditions apply.
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3.1.2 The above has been drawn on the basis of a broad 20-minute (3-mile) catchment of Longsight, this being considered a reasonable catchment in-line with the advice of Manchester Active.

3.1.3 The audit analysis sets out:

- The Quantity of bowling greens
- Quality of bowling greens
- Accessibility and availability of bowing greens
- Adequacy of provision.

3.1.4 It considers the supply and demand in order to provide a greater understanding of the distribution of facilities and the supply and demand for these facilities. The audit has been developed using the existing evidence base, site visits and consultation with clubs as part of this report and discussions with local league representatives.

3.1.5 The audit it set out in the table 3.1 overleaf.

Table 3.1 – Bowls Catchment Audit

Name	Analysis Area	Distance	No. of Greens	Membership	Status	Ownership	Quality	Comments
Greenbank Park	**Central**	**0.7 miles**	**1**	**24**	**Pay and Play**	**Council**	**Standard**	**Council operated. Closest to Longsight. Unclear whether a club operates there. Fenced off green in public park, small shelter at side of the green, green is in standard condition, a hut type building is used as a clubhouse and a place to store equipment. Situated in a multipurpose park. Used to have a second green but has long since been used. Potential to re-open it as nothing else there at present.**
High Bank Park	**Central**	**1.8 miles**	**2**	**-**	**Club Use and pay and play**	**Council / Club**	**Good**	**Two securely fenced off good quality crown greens. Owned by the council but High Bank Bowls Club play here. One green has the clubhouse within the area. Also has other seating areas. Second green has less seating areas and a small shelter. The second green to benefit from investment via mitigation for the loss of Openshaw AEU Club.**
Debdale Park	**Central**	**2 miles**	**2**	**98**	**Club Use and pay and play**	**Council / Club**	**Good**	**Two good quality crown greens securely fenced off. Owned by the council but members take an active role in maintenance. Clubhouse is used for bowling amongst other activities. A thriving club.**
Beech House (RBL)	South	1.2 miles	1	26	Private	Club	Good	Securely fenced off, green is of good quality. Social club used as a clubhouse for members. Sheltered area for players/members. Close to

Name	Analysis Area	Distance	No. of Greens	Membership	Status	Ownership	Quality	Comments
								Longsight and with significant capacity. Located in the South area.
Burnage Village Garden Bowls Club	South	1.6 miles	1	21	Club	Council	Poor	One poor quality green, according to the PPOSS that is securely fenced off. The site visit indicated that the green was perhaps of better quality. The village hall is located within the grounds and is used as a clubhouse for the bowlers. Green is maintained by volunteers. Currently used by some Longsight members, who work in partnership with Burnage Village BC to ensure teams are able to compete and BVG is sustainable.
Ladybarn Park	South	1.9 miles	1	-	Pay and Play	Council	Good	
Withington Bowls Club	South	2.3 miles	1	60	Club	Sports Club	Good	
Fallowfield Bowling and Lawn Tennis Club	South	2.3 miles	1	28	Club	Sports Club	Standard	Standard condition green, floodlit with shelter.
Delemere Park	North	3.3 miles	2	22	Pay and Play	Council	Good	
North Reddish	Stockport	1.8 miles	1	-				
Houldsworth Park	Stockport	2.3 miles	2	50	Club Use and pay and play	Council / Club	Good	They run 4 teams, combination of men's, women's and veterans. Membership as of 2022 was free
Houldsworth Working Mens Club	Stockport	2.4 miles	1	-				

3.2 Quantity

3.2.1 Table 3.1 summarises the existing stock of bowling greens across the central area and the wider 20-minute catchment area, as of early 2024, and illustrates there is extensive alternative provision to Longsight.

3.2.2 There are 4 crown green sites in the central area, excluding Longsight, however one at Crowcroft Park is now disused, having been taken out of commission by Manchester City Council, it is assumed this was based on the lack of need.

3.2.3 Of the 3 remaining sites, 2 contain double greens, making a total of 5 greens. Greenbank Park also formally had 2 greens but one has been taken out of commission, again this is assumed to be as a result of lack of demand. This could potentially be re-instated by the Council if required.

3.2.4 In the wider catchment there are a further 11 greens, including double greens at Delemere Park (22 members) and Houldsworth Park (50 members).

3.2.5 Both within the Central Area and wider catchment there is a good mix of Council and club provision, offering both league and pay and play opportunities.

3.2.6 The BCGBA does not have any specific guidance on bowling green capacity, stating that it can vary from site-to-site and from club-to-club. However, it states that any green used by less than 20 members is generally considered to be un-sustainable, whilst any green operating with a membership of over 80 may need additional resource to ensure that it is meeting the required level of demand.

3.2.7 Longsight was operating with an active playing membership of only 11, which is clearly un-sustainable. This prompted the club to partner with Burnage Village. Longsight members therefore supported the sustainability of Burnage Village, which only had 21, ensuring its sustainability going forward. Longsight members have also now subsequently started to play at Beech House, which only has 26 members, thus also supporting this site.

3.2.8 The 3 closest greens to Longsight are therefore all operating close to being un-sustainable. Greenbank has a membership of only 24, Beech House 26 and Burnage Village 21. There is therefore clearly significant capacity to meet the needs of any displaced Longsight members, not already playing at Burnage Village and Beech House, and any unmet or latent demand that may arise in the catchment after the potential closure of the site.

The figures set out in the paragraphs above were as reported in early 2024.

3.2.9 Debdale Park does have a good thriving membership but this is accommodated over a 2-green facility. The membership at High Bank is unknown, but it is due to benefit from an influx of members from Openshaw AEU, with a 2-green facility numbers are unlikely to reach in excess of 100, which would start to make the facility at or over capacity. Withington is the only site across the catchment, and this is nearly 2.5 miles away, which has capacity issues.

3.2.10 Table 3.1 therefore indicates that there are a suitable quantity of alternatives for the members of Longsight Bowls Club to move to other clubs and/or other greens within a reasonable catchment area. This is and has happened at both Burnage Village and more recently Beech House.

3.3 Quality

3.3.1 The quality of bowling greens is as important as the amount of facilities that are available. Poor quality greens impact upon the playing experience and clubs with higher quality facilities often attract larger number of members.

3.3.2 Longsight was only rated as standard and the club, within the PPOSS identified various quality issues. Given the financial constraints set out and the cost of operating bowls at the site there is no prospect of these being addressed.

3.3.3 The quality of greens in the catchment area has been evaluated through:

- Consultation with clubs
- Consultation with Cheadle and Gatley League representatives
- Site visits
- PPOSS.

3.3.4 Table 3.1 summarises the quality of each green within the catchment. It indicates that the quality of active greens in the catchment is primarily good, this is mainly due to the continued maintenance done by the members. All sites in within the vicinity of Longsight have either a social club or a clubhouse on site where members can gather before or after playing, therefore replicating the provision being lost.

3.3.5 The greens within the immediate catchment of Longsight are more variable, with Greenbank classed as standard and Burnage Village poor. On inspection Burnage Village looks in reasonable condition, but clearly there are potential quality issues to address. Beech House is considered to be good.

3.3.6 The quality of alternative provision is therefore not considered to be a barrier to the potential loss of Longsight.

3.4 Accessibility and Availability

3.4.1 Map 3.1 and Table 3.1 demonstrates the location of bowling greens across the catchment and the distances from Longsight. The loss of Longsight would not impact on the 15-minute accessibility standard, with significant alternative and available provision falling within the catchment area.

3.4.2 Reflecting the quantitative analysis earlier in this report, the data illustrates that, greens are well distributed to serve the Longsight population. Specifically Greenbank, Burnage Village, Beech House and High Bank Park all within close proximity to Longsight, they offer a good variety of options. All are accessible and with significant capacity.

3.4.3 Beech House has a social club if the social side is an important factor for new members. Debdale run classes, events and fundraisers in their clubhouse if members want to be active with other activities as well as bowls.

3.4.4 Burnage Village is located in the centre of an estate which has the village hall within its grounds if being part of a small community minded club is an important factor.

3.4.5 Greenbank is a Council facility offering pay and play opportunities, alongside a resident club.

3.4.6 As set out previously, the 3 closest greens to Longsight are all operating close to being un-sustainable. Greenbank had a membership of only 24, Beech House 26 and Burnage Village 21. There is therefore clearly significant capacity to meet the needs of any displaced Longsight members, not already playing at Burnage Village and Beech House, and any unmet or latent demand that may arise in the catchment after the potential closure of the site.

3.4.7 The alternative provision in the Longsight catchment is therefore both accessible and available.

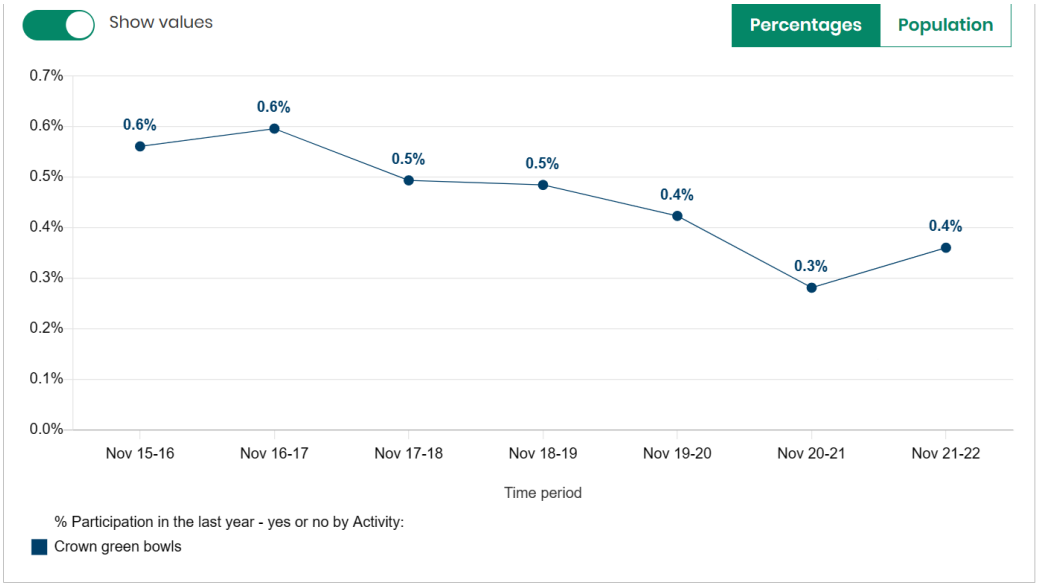
3.5 Demand

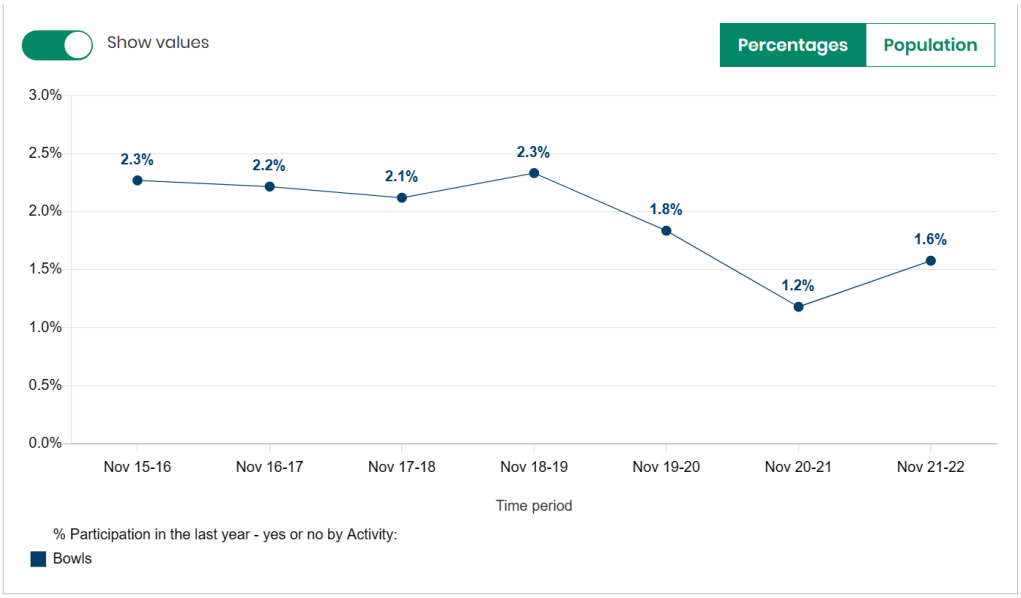
3.5.1 Nationally, the Sport England Active People survey indicated that participation in outdoor bowls declined over the 2005 - 2016 period. In 2005 0.83% of the adult population played outdoor bowls at least once a week. By 2016 this dropped to 0.51%.

3.5.2 The Active Lives Survey records activity from 2015 – 2016 and 2016 – 2017. It reveals that between 0.7 and 0.8% of the population participate in bowls or boules. Figures in 2016/2017 represent a slight, but not statistically significant, decline in this level of participation.

3.5.3 Nationally therefore, participation is static or declining.

3.5.4 As we can see from the below graph crown green bowls has declined in its participation rates nationally since 2016. Even though there was an increase in the years 2021-2022 it is not at the same level it was previously.





Despite Bowls England's effort (highlighted further below) bowls in general has also seen a decline in participation trends overall over the past few years.

National Governing Body Priorities

3.5.5 The British Crown Green Bowling Association is the Governing Body for Crown Greens Bowls in England. In addition to running national competitions, it (and its county officers) seek to support local clubs in the management and running of their greens and provide advice on the promotion of bowls. The overall objective of the association is to promote, support and improve Crown Green Bowling. All bowling greens in Knowsley Borough are Crown Green Bowls and therefore fall under the remit of the British Crown Green Bowls Association.

3.5.6 The Bowls Development Alliance (BDA) is an umbrella organisation for the sport of bowls. While it no longer appears to encompass the British Crown Green Bowls Association, it often works alongside this organisation to implement initiative targeting improved participation. The main drive of the BDA is the development of bowls, with a focus on increasing participation of those aged 55 and over. The BDA has recently developed a Play Bowls Strategy, which sets out key priorities for 2017 – 2021. They will be working to achieve the following objectives:

- Strengthen resilience in bowls core market
- Continue to introduce new people into bowls
- Ensure all projects are fully inclusive
- Contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of participants
- Develop accurate data collection and insight
- Upskill the volunteer workforce
- Ensure clubs have support in the maintenance and development of their facilities.

Strategy, Vision & Values - Bowls Development Alliance

3.5.7 Of particular note in this strategy, the importance of facilities is highlighted. The British Crown Green Bowls Association does not currently have a facility strategy however and whilst Bowls England are committed to producing a facility strategy, this has not yet been published. This means that there is no detailed guidance on facility requirements.

3.5.8 Maintaining existing levels of participation and reinvigorating the sport however remains at the forefront of priorities all organisations involved in bowls and there is general consensus that the key issues for bowls include:

- The older age profile of members and the impact that this has on growing and maintaining participation. In particular, there is a lack of people aged 20 - 50 and a dearth of young people
- The need for greater flexibility in the sport if participation is to increase. Current patterns of play rely on afternoon / early evening starts, meaning that the sport can be restrictive for younger members. Where efforts have been made to run nighttime leagues however, these are still reliant upon bowlers aged 60+ and there has been limited engagement with younger residents
- The cost of maintaining facilities, declining membership and lack of funding to effect improvements
- The challenges in providing facilities where bowlers feel safe and comfortable.

3.5.9 A research report (October 2016) undertaken by Sport England into the issues facing the sustainability of bowls reflected many of the concerns raised above, indicating that there is:

- Falling membership and high age profile of existing members
- Reduction in the number of new members
- Members are very sensitive to increases in fees, but that increase in membership fees has been necessary to offset declining numbers; and
- Increasing maintenance / green upkeep fees.

3.5.10 It concludes that:

- Recruitment of new members is key to ongoing sustainability
- There is a need to implement sound financial management practices. This includes a need to explore alternative methods of income generation (a bar / social facilities etc are key to financial sustainability). There is also a need to maximise secondary income streams (hire out facilities / sponsorship etc) to ensure that income can be ring fence for a sinking fund
- Maintenance costs and machinery are the highest financial burdens - there may be opportunities to think creatively about how this can be improved (maintenance hubs etc)
- The 40 - 55 age group is crucial to reduce the overall age profile and to drive club activities (but there is a struggle to engage with these groups); and
- There is often a reliance on one individual and development business plans need to be put in place.

3.5.11 It is therefore evident that maintaining existing levels of participation is central to ensuring the ongoing sustainability of bowls.

Local Demand and Consultation

3.5.12 Locally across Manchester, it is clear that there has been a decline over several years, with several clubs in the area folding and no new clubs emerging despite the availability of facilities. Within the Longsight catchment Crowcroft Park has closed, Openshaw AEU is no longer operating and a green has been taken out of commission at Greenbank.

3.5.13 There are currently 12 disused greens across 11 sites in Manchester, none of which have been reinstated for club or pay and play use.

3.5.14 The national trends therefore appear to be reflected in Manchester. Consultation with local league secretaries further cements this view.

3.5.15 Having spoken with the board at the Cheadle and Gatley league they have echoed the same concerns that we found when speaking with local clubs. They note the decline in participation is a worrying trend that they cannot seem to stop. The appeal of bowls to a younger audience is

one of the biggest challenges. A representative of the Cheadle and Gatley League was on Manchester City Council's Committee on bowling which was interested in putting bowls on school activities.

3.5.16 On a national scale Bowls England are trying to drive recruitment. They held a 'Bowls' Big Weekend' from Friday 26th May to Monday 29th May 2023. This was a chance for clubs to welcome new people to start their bowls journey. According to Bowls England 750 events took place over the weekend with more than 550 clubs participating. Bowls England said that there was a significant increase on the average number of people attending from 2022, which was 16 per club.

3.5.17 Bowls England have also created a new format called 'Bowls Bash' which is described as 'an exciting, new form of lawn bowls that is really easy to play and fun for all ages and abilities.' However there has been no data published in relation to participation levels and none of the clubs we have spoken to have mentioned 'Bowls Bash'.

3.5.18 They also rolled out a website called 'Play Bowls', which is an online booking system where clubs can offer pay and play to non-members when there is spare capacity. The idea is that non-members can play in a non-competitive environment with friends in the hope that they will become members of the club. Again though, there is no data on how successful this has been so far.

3.5.19 Despite the NGB efforts, locally clubs and leagues are having to adapt and change rules to meet the challenges they face. The league has reduced the team size from 12 players a side, to 10 and it is now currently 8 a side. Some leagues now have mixed teams of men and women whereas previously it used to be same sex only. This issue is prevalent at Longsight and reflected in the members now playing at Burnage and subsequently Beech House.

3.5.20 Consultation has confirmed that the decline in bowls participation over the last few years can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, the covid-19 pandemic had a big impact on clubs and members. Clubs were unable to play during lockdown but still incurred costs such as maintenance and clubhouse bills. Once the lockdown ended some members did not return to play which put further pressure on clubs.

3.5.21 Another reason is due to the average age of bowls players many have retired in the last few years. This can be again in part due to the covid-19 pandemic as well as, clubs and greens closing some members have chosen to retire instead of playing at an alternative club. Clubs are finding that it is a real struggle to recruit new players, the most common issue is that perception that bowls is a sport for 'old men'. Players that stop playing are not being replaced, despite the NGB efforts.

3.5.22 The City Council policy of handing over the running of bowling greens to the bowling clubs, has also had consequences, with greens being railed off, this in turn has stopped the pay and play aspect which has been a big social side lost for bowls players. They now can only play in a competitive league setting at scheduled days and times.

3.5.23 This means that there are now several sites capable of sustaining far greater activity than they are currently doing so, an example of this relevant to Longsight would be Greenbank Park.

3.5.24 All in all the demand for bowls across the area is declining and the current usage and membership levels at Longsight are symptomatic of this. Longsight members playing at both Burnage and Beech House is helping to drive the sustainability of bowls across the catchment going forward.

3.6 Adequacy of Provision

3.6.1 There are no formal supply and demand models for bowling greens. The adequacy of provision is therefore evaluated by drawing together the data collated, using the ANOG framework, and determining the key issues impacting current and projected future participation in terms of the amount and quality of greens and access to the greens.

Quantity

3.6.2 There are 4 crown green sites in the central area, excluding Longsight, however one at Crowcroft Park is now disused, having been taken out of commission by Manchester City Council, it is assumed this was based on the lack of need.

3.6.3 Of the 3 remaining sites, 2 contain double greens, making a total of 5 greens. Greenbank Park also formally had 2 greens but one has been taken out of commission, again this is assumed to be as a result of lack of demand. This could potentially be re-instated by the Council if required.

3.6.4 In the wider catchment there are a further 11 greens, including double greens at Delemere Park and Houldsworth Park.

3.6.5 Both within the Central Area and wider catchment there is a good mix of Council and club provision, offering both league and pay and play opportunities.

3.6.6 Longsight was operating with an active playing membership of only 11, which is clearly un-sustainable. Longsight members now support the sustainability of Burnage Village and more recently Beech House, ensuring their sustainability going forward.

3.6.7 The 3 closest greens to Longsight are all operating close to being un-sustainable. Greenbank had a membership of only 24, Beech House 26 and Burnage Village 21. There is therefore clearly significant capacity to meet the needs of any displaced Longsight members, not already playing at Burnage Village and Beech House and any unmet or latent demand that may arise in the catchment after the potential closure of the site.

Quality

3.6.8 Longsight was only rated as standard and the club, within the PPOSS identified various quality issues. Given the financial constraints set out and the cost of operating bowls at the site there is no prospect of these being addressed.

3.6.9 The quality of active greens in the catchment is primarily good, this is mainly due to the continued maintenance done by the members. All sites in within the vicinity of Longsight have either a social club or a clubhouse on site where members can gather before or after playing, therefore replicating the provision being lost. The quality of alternative provision is therefore not considered to be a barrier to the potential loss of Longsight.

Access and Availability

3.6.10 Alternative greens are well distributed to serve the Longsight population. Specifically Greenbank, Burnage Village, Beech House and High Bank Park all within close proximity to Longsight, they offer a good variety of options. All are accessible and with capacity.

3.6.11 The 3 closest greens to Longsight are all operating close to being un-sustainable. Greenbank had a membership of only 24, Beech House 26 and Burnage Village 21. There is therefore clearly significant capacity to meet the needs of any displaced Longsight members, not already playing at Burnage Village and Beech House and any unmet or latent demand that may arise in the catchment after the potential closure of the site.

3.6.12 There is a high concentration of facilities in Longsight area even with the recent green losses. The facilities are generally accessible as the majority are located within public parks.

3.6.13 The alternative provision in the Longsight catchment is therefore both accessible and available.

Summary

Table 3.2 – Meeting the ANOG Tests for surplus

Benchmark criteria	**Important green must be protected and cannot be deemed surplus**	**The green has merits, the loss would have an impact but could be mitigated through either re-provision or investment**	**Limited value bowling green, 'surplus to requirements', loss would have minimal impact on bowls, current and future users**
Quantity	In an area with limited or no alternative provision or different bowls offers	In an area of some alternative provision	In an area of high supply with significant alternative provision **This is the case at Longsight.**
Quality	High quality with good reputation locally Viable and well managed Good drainage and green quality and ancillary provision Good membership levels above benchmark, waiting list and healthy pay and play usage Full and thriving female and junior section	Good quality with good reputation Average membership levels in line with benchmarks but some capacity to increase membership Some female and junior members	Poor quality and reputation, and condition issues Unviable and / or poorly managed Poor membership levels below benchmark of 20 and very low pay and play usage Limited or no female or junior members No alternative offering or opportunity to enhance quality of provision **This is the case at Longsight. Only 11 members in early 2024, all elderly male and no funding to improve the quality.**
Access	Very few alternative greens in a reasonable catchment Any loss would result in gaps in provision	A range of alternatives in catchment	In an area of high supply with a large number of greens in a reasonable catchment. Loss would not result in a distinct gap in provision. **This is the case at Longsight.**
Availability	Alternative greens are all full with wating lists and little or no capacity for new members Pricing levels and membership restrictions present a barrier	Some alternative greens with capacity to meet some of the demand from displaced members and users Some pricing and membership barriers	Lots of alternative greens with capacity to meet the needs of displaced members and any pay and play usage No pricing or membership restrictions.

Benchmark criteria	**Important green must be protected and cannot be deemed surplus**	**The green has merits, the loss would have an impact but could be mitigated through either re-provision or investment**	**Limited value bowling green, 'surplus to requirements', loss would have minimal impact on bowls, current and future users**
			This is the case at Longsight, members have already moved to Burnage and more recently Beech House.

3.6.14 Table 3.2 therefore summarises the key issues raised in relation to the provision of bowling greens at Longsight and illustrates how the green can be deemed *surplus to requirements*, particularly set against the declining trends in participation evidenced nationally and locally.

3.6.15 Section 4 considers the impact of the findings of this assessment on the future role of Longsight Bowling Club in the context of planning policy.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

4.1.1 This report provides an assessment of bowls needs locally in the Longsight area of Manchester and the wider catchment, and indicates that there is adequate provision to meet the current demand and sufficient spare capacity to meet projected future demand.

4.1.2 Whilst it is clear that the bowling green at Longsight is un-sustainable and surplus to the requirements of the current owners. It is understood that in order to meet wider policy requirements, it is necessary to also consider the wider strategic need for bowls green.

4.1.3 This is now assessed in the context of NPPF paragraph 103, as set out below.

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

A - 'An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements

- *There is no clear and overriding case to retain the bowls green at Longsight, to meet demand for bowling in the area, given the supply of alternative greens in the catchment area, the accessibility of the study area to existing facilities and the spare capacity at other local greens, which will be able to absorb current levels of participation at Longsight*
- *Indeed the 11 active members recorded in early 2024 are already actively partnering with Burnage Village (May 2024) and more recently have moved to Beech House*
- *Having said this, the 'bar' for what is deemed surplus is hard to define*
  What is clear is that the green does not need to be replaced to meet any current of future need
- *Test met.*

B - the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location

- *Whilst deeming the green surplus there is no a need for a replacement 'like for like' facility*
- *Given the national and local participation trends set out, demand for all forms of bowls, in the future can be more than adequately absorbed by the current levels of supply*
- *Replacement bowls provision would impact negatively on the viability of the remaining greens in the area, particularly Burnage Village and Beech House*
- *Not applicable.*

C - the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use'

- *There are 12 disused greens across 11 sites*
- *The PPOSS notes that these sites should be protected from development until all demand is met (unless adequately re-provided elsewhere in accordance with Sport England's Playing Fields Policy), as there is potential need for playing field land to accommodate more pitches to meet the identified shortfalls*
- *To meet this recommendation and policy test the site would be required to be 'fit for purpose' to meet other sporting uses identified in the Central Area*

- *Taking into account the current dimensions of the development site at Longsight Bowls Club and its road side location the site is not fit for purpose to house alternative sport and recreational provision, it would not fit any youth football, rugby union, rugby league, cricket, Gaelic football or hockey pitches, grass or artificial*
- *Whilst the space provided would fit a multi-use games area (MUGA), our research found that there are already these facilities located nearby in Crowcroft Park less the 500 yards away and therefore any provision on site at Longsight would be duplication*
- *Not applicable.*

Conclusions

4.1.4 The analysis set out in this report and application of the NPPF above demonstrates that there appears to be enough alternative bowls provision in the Central Area, and across the wider catchment, that the priority is enhancing the quality and sustainability of the existing facilities. There does not appear to be a requirement for additional or new bowling greens to replace those lost. Other sporting uses of the Longsight site are not deliverable given the size or location.

4.1.5 Re-providing Longsight with a new facility would impact significantly on Burnage and Beech House and other facilities in the area, which are only just sustainable. New quality provision in the area would impact on this significantly and would likely lead to their closure.

4.1.6 There appears to be no unmet demand that the proposed development site is needed to meet, over and above investing in the existing infra-structure, particularly given the proximity of Longsight to other facilities, with significant capacity.

4.1.7 The evidence set out in this report, we believe therefore confirms that there is no clear strategic need for the protection of the bowling green at the proposed development site, or crucially the replacement, indeed the green could justifiably be deemed *surplus to requirements*, applying the ANOG tests. Consultation with Manchester Active supports this view.

4.1.8 Taking into account paragraph 103, our work shows the land could be deemed to be surplus to requirements. The club originally a cricket club stopped playing cricket in 2004. With the demonstrated decline in participation in bowls both locally and nationally and with the evidence provided for sufficient capacity in the area.

4.1.9 It concludes that there is no requirement to provide any new greens or reinstate former greens or provide additional provision, as any growth in participation can be accommodated within the existing infra-structure, indeed greater use is required if the existing infrastructure is to be sustainable.

4.1.10 Applying the ANOG criteria of *quality, quantity, access and availability* it can be argued that there is sufficient *quantity* of bowling greens across Manchester and in the Longsight catchment, which are both *accessible and available.*

4.1.11 In this context it is therefore concluded that the loss of the bowling green at Longsight Bowls Club is justifiable as there is an excess of provision, which potentially meets exception criteria set out in both national and local policy, this is supported by Manchester Active.

4.1.12 We understand there are no clearly defined parameters by Sport England (or in the NPPF) as to what level of provision constitutes a *surplus*. Whilst it is never clear where this bar lies and can be interpreted differently by different planning officers, often depending on the wider planning issues in respect of a specific scheme, this report presents the available evidence, which suggests that the facility is not required and could justifiably be deemed surplus.

4.1.13 The closure of Openshaw AEU has been raised as impacting on the wider bowls capacity. Having reviewed the Open Space Assessment prepared by Wardell Armstrong as part of the planning application for that site, it appears bowls facilities, close to Opensahaw AEU, such as Delamere Park and High Bank, have significant capacity and the migration of members will likely sustain those facilities. Given this we do not think the closure of Openshaw has a material impact on assessing the provision of bowls linked to Longsight or affects the conclusion of this report.

Mitigation

4.1.14 We note however that even where it is accepted that a site is surplus to requirements, Sport England guidance suggests that contributions towards qualitative contributions may also still be required. This point was emphasised in the consultation response from Manchester Active set out previously in section one.

4.1.15 Whilst Longsight could be argued to be surplus to requirements, it is acknowledged therefore that mitigation is required. There are qualitative issues in relation to the green at Burnage Village, which at the time of the original needs assessment in May 2024 was the predominant site used by Longsight members.

4.1.16 Since then Longsight members have gravitated to Beech House to play, and this is now considered a more appropriate site for mitigation. Burnage Village are happy to maintain their current membership levels and operation, without the permanent migration of Longsight members.

4.1.17 Over the past six months membership at Beech House has reduced to only 18 members. 16 people from Longsight have now joined Beech House giving a more sustainable membership base of 34 in total at Beech House.

4.1.18 Over the past few months, given this updated position and desire by Manchester Active to secure mitigation, discussions have therefore been held with Beech House in respect of a mitigation package.

4.1.19 The green at Beech House is considered to be good quality, both in the PPOSS and by the club. Equipment is however poor and green surrounds also require attention. A package of support has therefore been agreed of £11,925, to ensure the club can maintain the quality of the green and support the increased capacity from Longsight members.

4.1.20 Details of the package, which is to be secured under a unilateral undertaking is set out in the attached letter.