

SUMMARY REPORT

The Use & Management of Synthetic Pitches in Areas of Best Supply 1998/99

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a survey into the use of synthetic grass pitches carried out in November and December 1998. The survey took place in three areas in England - South West Hertfordshire, Bristol/Bath/North East Somerset and Nottinghamshire, chosen because they were considered to be areas of 'best supply'.

The aim of the survey was to collect data that could be used to calibrate Sport England's Facilities Planning Model (FPM).

The purpose of the survey was not to provide nationally representative data and therefore the results presented in this report are not intended to reflect use of synthetic pitches generally. However, the results do provide a useful picture of the use of synthetic pitches particularly in areas where all demand is likely to be expressed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey consisted of three distinct parts:

- a survey of users of synthetic grass pitches (user survey);
- collation of records of usage patterns during the survey period (programme survey); and
- a survey of the practices of the managers of the synthetic grass pitches (management survey).

The survey was carried out at a total of 26 sites within the three areas of best supply.

The survey of users was conducted over a period of seven consecutive days between 9 November and 6 December 1998 by means of a self-completion questionnaire, handed out to all synthetic pitch users (aged 11 and over) at each site.

During each separate booking, interviewers also conducted a complete count of all people present at the pitch.

Managers at all 26 sites involved in the survey were also asked to complete a management questionnaire and a programme diary. Twelve managers responded to the programme survey and 16 to the management questionnaire.

WHO USES SYNTHETIC PITCHES?

During one week in November/December 1998 a total of 11,904 visits were made by at least 7,360 people to a synthetic pitch in the three areas of best supply ¹

¹ The *frequency* of visit was used to calculate the number of visitors from the visit data. However not all respondents provided frequency information and the overall visitor numbers may be under-represented by as much as 20%.

The majority of synthetic pitch users were men (79%).

Six per cent of users were from an ethnic minority background which compares to 5% in the population as a whole.

Five per cent of users had what they classed as a long term illness or disability that limited their daily activities or work. This compares to 22% in the population as a whole.

The majority of users of synthetic pitches were aged between 16 and 34 (63%).

Most users of synthetic pitches were either in full-time employment (70%) or full-time education (23%).

Use of synthetic pitches was dominated by the upper socio-economic groups. The majority of users (over 80%) came from households whose chief income earner worked in a non-manual profession with almost a third where the chief income earner was in a professional or managerial position. These proportions were much greater than for the population as a whole.

Just over half of synthetic pitch users took part in 5-a-side football (53%). A further 28% took part in a full-sized hockey game and 15% in a full-size football game.

Men's use of synthetic pitches was dominated by football accounting for almost 80% of visits. In contrast, women were more likely to play hockey which accounted for 85% of visits.

Ten percent of visits to the synthetic pitches involved first time visitors whilst four out of every five users were repeat visitors, contributing to about 90% of all visits.

Around 80% of visits came from within a catchment of 10 miles and around three quarters of visits were made from within a 20 minute drive time.

Only 8% of synthetic pitch users had a discount card that gave them either a reduction in price or priority booking access for using the synthetic pitch.

HOW ARE SYNTHETIC PITCHES MANAGED?

Eleven of the 16 sites which responded to the management questionnaire operated a concessionary charging scheme. For a majority of sites this was based on reduced prices for eligible people.

At nine of the sites district/borough boundaries had no effect on eligibility for concessions with residents and non-residents alike able to benefit.

At 14 of the synthetic pitch sites managers had a formal operating contract with the site's owners. Sports clubs (at 10 sites) and schools (10 sites) were the most likely user groups to feature in the policy guidance, followed by young people (8 sites) and representative squads (6 sites).

HOW ARE SYNTHETIC PITCHES PROGRAMMED?

Synthetic pitches were available for hire for 70% of the hours between 7.00 am and 11.00 pm for the weeks of the survey.

Of this available time football (which was programmed for 23% of the time) and hockey (21%) were the activities most likely to be programmed.

Club use was the most likely type of sporting use to be programmed on pitches, accounting for 39% of all use.

Most sessions tended to be either of 1 hour duration or 2 hours.

Pitch space which was available but not booked accounted for 46% of the total available time.