



TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Monday, 23 November 2020

REPORT TITLE:	GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an update to Committee on the developing role that football has to play in the Borough.

The Council is looking to develop its offer in regard to provision of high-quality artificial grass pitch (AGP) all-weather facilities, for use by all. This is the capital finance programme development, for which we propose applying to the Football Foundation for funding.

The Council is also developing the way in which it engages local partnerships at grassroots level, in an attempt to intervene early on in the lives of vulnerable children and young people, to prevent the onset of complex needs and their associated funding requirements. This is the revenue finance programme development, for which we propose applying to the Football Foundation for funding.

RECOMMENDATION/S:

That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee be recommended to approve and support:

- (1) the development of the business case and grant application process to the Football Foundation for the first two priority AGP proposed sites at Woodchurch Leisure Centre and Wirral Tennis Centre, Bidston. Subject to Council approval for the match funding from the capital programme.
- (2) the development of the business case and grant application process to the Football Foundation, for the remaining three priority sites Leasowe, Arrowe Park and Bromborough, in due course. Subject to Council approval for the match funding from the capital programme.
- (3) the revenue grant application process to the Football Foundations' 'Active Through Football' fund.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 Staff resource has recently been allocated to the development of grassroots football in Wirral. Since this resource has been allocated, the Football Foundation has selected Wirral Council as one of 22 'Beacon' authorities in England, to recognise the solidity of the partnership and the quality of work being delivered.
- 1.2 The borough has a shortage of approximately 22 football provision facilities. Demand far exceeds supply.
- 1.3 Each AGP site costs approximately £1.3m. It is anticipated that up to 80% of total cost per AGP site (approximately £1.04m) would be covered by Football Foundation external grant. The Council would be expected to match fund the remaining amount per site. For example, per facility and based on an approximate cost of £1.3m, if the Football Foundation provided 80% (£1.04m), the Council would be expected to contribute 20% (£260k) of total facility cost. There is no hard and fast rule in terms of grant allocation and resulting Council match required – each site is bespoke; the previous figures are used as an example. There may be an instance whereby a grant of 65% is offered for one site but on another, the grant may stretch to 82%. Confirmation of any Council contribution would be via a separate approved internal business case demonstrating the proposal met necessary investment criteria including affordability and then agreement of the Policy and Resources Committee.
- 1.4 Wirral Council can bid to the Football Foundation (who are managing the 'Active Through Football' fund on behalf of the National Lottery) for a share of a £10m revenue fund. This funding will be split fifteen ways across successful Local Authorities in England. The purpose of the fund is to engage, deliver physical and mental health improvement sessions, tackle deprivation and support our vulnerable children and young people in line with the developing leisure strategy.
- 1.5 Football provides a diversionary activity, which reduces the cost and social impact associated with crime, substance dependency, poor mental and physical health and other forms of deprivation. Football creates opportunity for social mobility in our deprived communities.
- 1.6 Wirral is an area of 'strategic focus' for Cheshire FA and the Football Foundation. The borough has some of the highest demand for grassroots and competitive football in the country, but equally some of the lowest available facility provision. Wirral has some of the most deprived lower social economic groups (LSEG), with associated anti-social behaviour, crime and disorder and poor health statistics. Football is seen as a way to engage affected people in these LSEGs and help reduce deprivation.
- 1.7 These pitches should not be considered primarily as commercial income generators. However, there is commercial income for the Council associated with the ownership and management of AGP, all weather pitches. A single facility can expect to generate a return of approximately £50-70k per annum, and up to £100k in best-case circumstances (depending on the area and pricing policy). Associated lifecycle management and maintenance costs need to be considered and deducted (which

are estimated at approximately £35k per annum which is split into a £25k per annum core facility infrastructure replacement sinking fund and an estimated £10k per annum ongoing management and maintenance fund for replacement of; rubber crumb; lighting components; brushing; line marking; booking management and other general upkeep works). There will be no maintenance costs in year one due to a twelve-month defect guarantee, post completion. Surplus income could be reinvested back into grassroots football, to save on-going costs the Council would otherwise incur.

- 1.8 There are associated commercial cost savings to be achieved with a successful revenue grant application to the Active Through Football fund. The revenue grant would cover, in part, the salaries of our dedicated and professional team of sports development staff, who would be delivering the projects outputs and outcomes, that would otherwise be funded directly by the Council. There are also socio-economic savings associated with the engagement of Wirral's Lower Social Economic Groups through engagement in football activity.
- 1.9 The Council is facing a period of financial difficulty and it needs to be innovative and flexible in its approach to cost saving and achieving commercial outcomes, whilst tackling the health and wellbeing
- 1.10 Where possible the Council should strategically assess any planning applications for potential s106 finance from developers, which could be allocated to artificial turf, all weather football facilities, this would alleviate the need for the required approximate 20% and upwards financial match from the Council's own funds.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 **Do not progress:** This would have a negative impact on the Council's image and reputation with strategic partners in the football community including Tranmere Rovers FC, Liverpool FC, Everton FC, Merseyside Sport, Cheshire FA and the Football Foundation. The Council would not have to invest any of its own funds, but similarly would not receive any capital or revenue grant funding. No new facilities would be developed which would significantly impact on the Council's leisure strategy. Socio-economic impacts on LSEGs would compound and there would be no commercial income from pitch bookings. Lastly, the Council would need to accept a deteriorating stock of grass pitches and increased ongoing maintenance costs.
- 2.2 **Progress only some of the five proposed priority sites:** See 2.1
- 2.3 **Permit other organisations to develop proposals:** This is a core objective for the Council, it should take responsibility and grasp opportunity to develop commercial leisure facilities. It should not be left to external organisations to manage. Where possible external organisations should be encouraged to develop proposals in partnership with the Council – in order to meet the approximately 22 facility shortage. This is being done presently and enquiries are being managed from a variety of clubs and schools).
- 2.4 **Do not pursue the Football Foundation 'Active Through Football' revenue grant (at all or as lead organisation):** This would have a negative impact on the Council's image and reputation with strategic partners in the football community

including Tranmere Rovers FC, Liverpool FC, Everton FC, Merseyside Sport, Cheshire FA and the Football Foundation. It is not often that such revenue funding becomes available and the Council should be seen to take a leading role and develop strong delivery partnerships that allow project delivery to occur in sync with the development of physical facilities. Not applying for this fund would also mean the Council does not achieve the associated cost savings with regard to employee salaries.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Council is currently in the process of refreshing its 2016 'Playing Pitch Strategy'. In terms of the Council's responsibility in taking forward the presently identified five sites, no major changes are anticipated. The Council has also worked with the Football Foundation and Football Association to develop the 'Local Football Facility Plan'. Both documents are strategic planning framework documents and fit contextually with the 'Wirral Local Plan' and the 'Wirral Plan 2025'.
- 3.2 The demand for football in Wirral is extremely high. The Borough currently has a shortage of approximately 22 grass and/or AGP pitches, with many clubs having to travel outside of Wirral to play and train.
- 3.3 With regards to the development of 3G AGPs, there are five 'in principle' prioritised strategic sites; Woodchurch Leisure Centre; Wirral Tennis Centre Bidston; Leasowe (adjacent to the 7 waves community centre); Arrowe Park (adjacent to the existing car park) and Bromborough (Leverhulme playing fields).
- 3.4 Depending on local requirements and variabilities, each AGP facility will cost approximately £1.3m (AGP, car park, toilets/changing rooms/pavilion).
- 3.5 The Council is looking to develop capital funding packages through the Football Foundation to cover the bulk cost (approximately 80% or £1.04m) of building each facility. The council will be required to cover the remaining cost (approximately 20% or £260k) financial requirement of each facility. Any grant request to the Football Foundation will ultimately be assessed against both football and socio-economic outputs.
- 3.6 The current aim is to develop the first two sites (Woodchurch and Bidston) for build completion before end of financial year 2021 (March 2022). The remaining priority site developments (Leasowe, Arrowe Park and Bromborough) will follow with an estimated completion of all sites by end of financial year 2023 (March 2024). These are estimates and are subject to delay, given the current Liverpool City Region and national restrictions in place due to Covid-19.
- 3.7 It is estimated that once fully operational, each AGP on average can be expected to generate gross income in the region of £50-70k per annum and in best cases £100k, less costs identified in 1.7, making for a promising commercial investment. Surplus could be utilised for reducing Wirral's subsidy on grass pitches for example. There is also the positive impact on health and wellbeing, anti-social behaviour, employment and volunteering and reducing social isolation – all of which have their own associated cost savings.

- 3.8 The Council is also in the process of positioning itself as lead applicant in order to apply for revenue funding via the Football Foundation to promote grassroots football across the most disadvantaged communities in the Borough, namely; Birkenhead; Seacombe; Liscard; Woodchurch; Leasowe; Tranmere; Rock Ferry and Bidston. Successful applications will be notified in June 2021. Tranmere Rovers FC, among others, could be a strategic partner. Projects would be delivered locally in the aforementioned areas, in partnership with local organisations and beneficiaries.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Ongoing management and maintenance costs are estimated at approximately £35k per annum (£25k annual facility sinking fund and £10k annual maintenance fund, the latter is not payable in the first 12 months). As outlined in 1.7.
- 4.2 A contribution would be required from income raised, to cover the Council's capital financing costs for the project. Capital per site (of no less than 20% for each AGP facility) are estimated at £260k. Capital Financing costs would therefore be circa £28K per annum if a 10 year asset life was assumed or £38K per annum if a 7 year asset life was assumed.
- 4.3 Gross income generation through booking of each built facility (approximately £50-70k per site per annum and up to £100k per annum in best cases).
- 4.4 The Football Foundation have indicated grant support in the region of between 60-80% of the overall individual facility cost. The actual % offered per site in external grant will affect the Council's capital financing costs over the life of the facility. The Council would assess each grant offer on a case by case basis, and only if the proposed facility and grant offer provided net positive benefits would the Council be prepared to invest.
- 4.5 Cost savings associated with a successful revenue grant application to the Football Foundation's 'Active Through Football' grant. Any monies received will, in part, cover the cost of salaried Council employees for the duration of the project (5 years), who would otherwise be paid from Council's own budget.
- 4.6 This is an invest to save proposal, which would also secure a significant external capital investment, and a moderate revenue surplus once running. Simultaneously the Council will be tackling the Borough's 3G pitch shortage and providing physical diversionary activities for our communities, which have their own associated cost savings.
- 4.7 If no grants are applied for, and the Council wishes to progress the development of the recommendations in the Football Facility Plan at a later date, the Council would have to pay for 100% of the costs.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Procurement (cost and quality) and design/build would be carried out by a framework of providers outside of the Council's control. Here the Council would relinquish control to those frameworks of providers, whom have been vetted by the Football Foundation. As the Football Foundation is providing approximately 80% of the

required funds, the Council must adhere to their procurement regulations and appointments. This has to be a risk the Council is willing to accept in order to receive the approximately 80% contribution to overall cost. The alternative is to procure, pay for and contract manage in-house, without the Football Foundation providing finance.

- 5.2 The Council's Contract Procedure Rules may need to be waived if the Council uses the Football Foundation's framework of providers. The Council would have to be satisfied it was lawful having regard to the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, in the interests of the Council and value for money. This test could be applied when each individual business case was being considered.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 This work required the following resources; staff time – development and project management; staff time – management of each facility (maintenance and booking); consider implementing digital booking facility or using existing booking facility – associated cost and cost benefit; ongoing maintenance costs and replacement materials through wear and tear; staff time – accounting and financial management.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 **Programme slippage due to Covid-19 guidance and legislation change due to increased infection rates over winter.** This is largely unpredictable and will be managed from both a national and local perspective in a manner that presides over matters less important than public health.
- 7.2 **Procurement and contract management is outside direct control of the Council.** The Football Foundation has been through a rigorous tendering process and has vetted its supply chain for approved contractor status. The quality of service provided by this framework of contractors is evident across the country in many local authority areas.
- 7.3 **Failure to secure grant monies / internal capital finance match.** As with any grant application procedure there is a real risk of not being successful. However, both strategically and operationally, Wirral has positioned itself very favourably with all partners and we have given ourselves the best chance of succeeding. The only other option here is to avoid the risk of being unsuccessful by not applying, which would not put the Council in a positive light, given the level of engagement thus far, and the recommendations made in both appendices.
- 7.4 **Failure to secure planning permission.** Pre-planning discussions are gaining momentum and are positive, our assets and planning/development departments are involved and engaged in the process. Public consultation will be a main part of the grant application process. The sites are also listed with the strategic planning documents in **Section 12. Appendices 1 and 2.**

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Internally, the Council will be involved in consultation at all levels of seniority across the following departments; commercial; leisure; finance; legal; procurement; assets; planning and development; children and young people; adults; public health;

democratic services and elected members representing the associated wards where development is proposed. This list is not exclusive.

- 8.2 Externally, and as part of the required grant application process (both capital and revenue), the Council will be involved in consultation with a variety of important stakeholders and partners including; Tranmere Rovers; Liverpool FC; Everton FC (and their three respective charitable arms); Merseyside Sport; Local Authorities in the Liverpool City Region and Cheshire West and Chester; Football Foundation; Cheshire FA; Wirral based grassroots organisations and charities; local primary and secondary schools; the NHS and the Police. This list is not exclusive.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Please see Appendix 3 Equality Impact Assessment.

EIA will be published here:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Based on the outline detail of the proposals it is anticipated that the predominant scope of potential environmental impacts will be ecology/biodiversity, and light impacts (ecological impact).
- 10.2 Woodchurch Leisure Centre – The existing site comprises overgrown amenity grassland (formerly football pitch provision) anticipated to be of low ecological value. The site is bounded on two sides by tree line and woodland which may support several protected species of flora and fauna (e.g. bats, badgers), although this would require a Phase 1 desk top study and preliminary ecological assessment (walkover) to confirm. There are no other known protective features or designations identified at a local level. Given the nature of the proposals it is unlikely that there would be any residual impacts on ecological/wildlife features except for the use of floodlighting. It may be recommended to use directional hoods to minimise lighting impacts on nocturnal species, or to limit their use at certain times.
- 10.3 Wirral Tennis Centre (Bidston) – The existing site comprises a natural regenerated/succeeded site with a mix of semi-improved grassland, trees/woodland compartments and scrub vegetation. The mixture of habitat types on the site will provide some overall value to wildlife although given the scale of the proposal, the extent of the loss would be negligible given the local context. A Phase 1 desk top study and preliminary ecological assessment (walkover) will be required to determine the baseline and potential significant ecological impacts. This will determine the presence of any protected species and enable recommendations for mitigating measures (e.g. construction works to take place outside of relevant breeding seasons). The site also holds potential to contain invasive species and particular measures will be in place to ensure no off-site contamination and appropriate disposal. Given the nature of the proposals it is unlikely that there would be any residual impacts on ecological/wildlife features except for the use of floodlighting. It may be recommended to use directional hoods to minimise lighting impacts on nocturnal species, or to limit their use at certain times. There may also be opportunities to ensure biodiversity net gain, including measures and features of the

developments that create/enhance ecological and biodiversity features within and surrounding the site (e.g. SUDS features, bat roosts, connecting features etc.).

- 10.4 Planning – Importantly, the proposals will be subject to the full planning process and will be assessed by technical experts against prevailing planning and environmental policy to ensure no significant environmental impacts occur because of the proposal. The proposal and the surrounding environments will be scoped for potential impacts on aspects such as noise, light, air, landscape, ecology, archaeology, geology, human health etc.
- 10.5 Climatic impacts – Although the climate impacts associated with the project will be negligible, they will predominantly occur during the construction phase of the proposals and will be short term. This related to transport, materials, and construction methods. Best practice has been built into the design phase and it is not anticipated that there will be any long-term residual climate impacts. Measures will be taken to ensure best practice such as the use of LED floodlighting to reduce related carbon emissions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Wirral Borough Playing Pitch Strategy (2016-2022).
Appendix 2: Wirral Borough Local Football Facilities Plan (2018).
Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 4: Capital grant – A guide to the AGP Framework
Appendix 5: Capital grant – Terms and Conditions

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Not applicable	Not applicable