



## **TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, 8 March 2022**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT REPORT</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee with a progress update on grassroots football developments, specifically those which have taken place since the initial grassroots development key decision report was submitted for consideration to the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020.

This programme of work supports recommendations and pledges made within the Wirral Plan, Wirral's Local Football Facilities Plan and Wirral's Playing Pitch Strategy. It also supports the delivery of outcomes arising from the new Sports & Physical Activity Strategy – creating excellent outdoor spaces where all members of the community have access to excellent sports and activity facilities.

Presently, wards currently affected by projects soon to enter into delivery phase:

- Bidston And St James Ward (Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre 3G and car park)
- Upton (Woodchurch Leisure Centre supersize 3G pitch and pavilion)

This is not a key decision report.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Tourism Communities Culture and Leisure committee is requested to:

1. Note the progress made in the development of the Grassroots Football Programme.
2. Support the ongoing development and management of the Grassroots Football Programme.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 Football provides a diversionary activity, which reduces the costs and social impacts 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. Wirral has been defined, by the Football Foundation, as an area where demand for playing football far exceeds the level of facilities on offer to play football at. Wirral, as a geographical location has the second highest demand for football in the country per capita. Some of our clubs have up to ninety teams with no real fixed location to play.
- 1.2 Wirral is an area of strategic focus for Cheshire Football Association (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, disorder and poor health statistics. Football is seen as a way to engage affected people in these LSEGs and help reduce deprivation. Wirral Council should make the best of the opportunity presented.
- 1.3 The Council has faced and continues to face extended periods of financial difficulty and it needs to be innovative and flexible in its approach to delivering capital projects, with ongoing revenue implications. The Council needs to focus on programmes of work which deliver commercial benefits, help with budget pressures and cost reduction, whilst tackling health and wellbeing inequalities across the Borough.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Do not support the development of the Grassroots Football programme – this option was rejected; it was noted the Council needs to support the development of strategic proposals and to secure funding against those proposals.
- 2.2 Disengage the partnership with the Football Foundation and fund future sites solely with Council funds – this was rejected as the Council would otherwise have had to find an additional £1.75m of funding for these two sites alone.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 During the last 18 months – two strategic sites have been identified for development:
  - Woodchurch Leisure Centre – supersize artificial grass pitch and pavilion. Estimated total project value – £1.6m
  - Wirral Tennis and sports Centre – standard size artificial grass pitch and 114 space car park. Estimated project value – £1m

Due to the work Wirral Council has undertaken in developing its grassroots football work – the Football Foundation has named Wirral as a 'Beacon Authority'.

Funding applications have been submitted for both sites – both funding applications have taken over 12 months to develop, in partnership with our local communities and footballing clubs and leagues, the Football Foundation, Cheshire FA and Sport England. Our consultants Steve Wells Associates have supported in funding bid development and the technical processes of design and build management. Wirral Council should be informed of funding decisions for both projects on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022. Both Woodchurch Leisure Centre Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) and pavilion and Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre AGP and car park projects are currently awaiting planning decision, having been submitted on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022 respectively.

- 3.2 If funding applications are successful, we anticipate exchange and signing off on contracts to take up until end July 2022. After which point, contractors can begin to mobilise and begin the construction period – which will probably take us through to end December 2022. The pavilion construction element for the Woodchurch AGP will take slightly longer to complete, estimates are towards the end of February 2023.
- 3.3 In the previous committee report submitted to the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020, three additional sites were earmarked for AGP facility development; Arrove Country Park; Leasowe Leisure Centre and Leverhulme Playing Fields in Bromborough. However, it has been noted through technical/footballing outcome discussions that these sites may no longer be appropriate.
- 3.4 Wirral Council is now in the process of identifying further appropriate pipeline sites for investment in AGP facilities – these sites need to be vetted and approved via an inter-departmental working group. These sites need to strategically fit into the wider context of a Wirral-wide regeneration plan. This group has been established and consists of Leisure Services, Parks and Environment, Legal, Finance, Procurement and Regeneration colleagues from Major Projects, Planning and Assets. Once the sites have been identified, they then need to be appraised from a technical, financial and footballing outcomes perspective, to give them the best possible chance of succeeding from a funding, planning and outcomes provision and also from an income generation perspective.
- 3.5 A successful expression of interest application has been submitted to the Football Foundation, to its Grass Pitch Development Fund. Based on this application, Wirral Council has been selected as an authority that the Football Foundation wishes to work with at this pilot phase. The Council is currently in the process of analysing, in depth, the condition of Council owned grass pitch stock. This analysis will inform the level of investment required to bring the grass pitch stock up to standard. Investment will improve the quality of pitches and therefore the service to our community. Investment will also increase pitch capacity and improve the Council's ability to maintain the grass pitch stock, meaning fewer match cancellations on grass pitches. This work again feeds back into the outcomes laid out in the Wirral Plan and the Sports & Physical Activity Strategy.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Woodchurch Leisure Centre supersize AGP and pavilion – finalised costs are being worked up. Wirral Council expects a grant from the Football Foundation in excess of

£1m (62.5%) towards an estimated total project cost of approximately £1.6m. The Council will contribute approximately £600k.

- 4.2 Wirral Tennis Centre standard size AGP and car park – finalised costs are being worked up. Wirral Council expects a grant from the Football Foundation in excess of £760k (76%) towards an estimated total project cost of approximately £1m. The Council will contribute approximately £240k.
- 4.3 Both AGP facilities have been designed and developed in such a way as not to require any subsidy. In fact both sites will make a significant contribution to leisure service's income – predominantly from pitch hire, events, pavilion hire and sales from the pavilion's commercial kitchen.
- 4.4 As part of the business case, any cost of capital incurred by the Council and operational running costs of the pitches, will be offset by the income receivable from lettings and therefore will be cost neutral

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 For the AGP/carpark elements, procurement (cost and quality) and design/build are being carried out by the Football Foundation's framework providers, which are outside of the Council's control. Here the Council relinquishes an element of control to those frameworks of providers, whom have been vetted by the Football Foundation. As the Football Foundation is providing approximately 60-80% of the required funds, the Council must adhere to their procurement regulations and appointments. For these and future AGP developments, this has to be a risk the Council is willing to accept in order to receive the approximately 60-80% 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 Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre AGP – existing Council staff will manage the booking and operations associated with the new AGP.
- 6.2 Woodchurch AGP and Pavilion – The Council have entered into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Carr Bridge Community Centre to manage the pavilion and AGP during off-peak hours (9am-5pm). This community wealth building approach helps to save the council money, whilst entrusting a local community organisation with the management of the facility, in order that they can drive their own financial and social outcomes agenda – using the AGP as the vehicle to lever in grant funding...a much more sustainable long term way of working. The pavilion will be Wi-Fi ready and can be used as a work base for leisure centre staff. Wirral Council staff will manage the site during peak operational times (5pm-10pm)

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 Pavilion procurement – due to Brexit and the pandemic, the construction market is extremely volatile at present. We would expect a large variation in quotes on tendered bids.
- 7.2 Planning decisions for both projects – both sites are relatively straight forward. There may be some planning conditions which affect the delivery timescales and costings – but this will have to be dealt with when the notices are confirmed.
- 7.3 The AGP and pavilion build programme – due to Brexit and the pandemic, the construction market is extremely volatile at present. Work programmes for all construction elements will be received, agreed and communicated when appropriate
- 7.4 Income generation from booking and commercial kitchen – once built and operational it is within the Council's gift to really drive the income generating potential of these facilities. Both AGP facilities will have a steering group to drive and maximise income.
- 7.5 Maintaining positive links with the external partnerships – recommended that continued officer time be matched to the development of grassroots football in Wirral.
- 7.6 Developing the pipeline of next projects – recommend that the internal working group dedicate time and resource to the identification and promotion of new sites, and therefore the financing of.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 A full consultation for Wirral residents was carried out through the Council's 'Have Your Say' platform – the report from which is available to read as an appendix to this report.
- 8.2 Both funding applications have required over 12 months of considerable consultation, both with internal Council departments and also our external partnerships. Our consultants (Steve Wells Associates Ltd) have supported the Council and delivered extensive community engagement work, which has led to the security of partner clubs at each AGP, required for the achievement of the Football Foundations' funded football outcome requirements:

- Woodchurch AGP – Glenavon FC and Greasby JFC
- Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre AGP – Poulton Victoria and Oxton Ladies

The remainder of the booking slots will be made available to local clubs and community.

- 8.3 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.

8.4 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 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 These remain unchanged from the initial Tourism Communities Culture and Leisure committee report submitted and approved on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020. Please refer to the pasted link <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 These remain unchanged from the initial Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee report submitted and approved on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Both AGPs will provide Wirral's residents with excellent new facilities, they will benefit the local and the Borough wide community.

11.2 The facilities will keep the Wirral pound in Wirral – rather than residents having to leave the Borough to book AGP pitch slots outside of the Borough, for example in Cheshire West at Vauxhall Sports Club or Stanney Oaks Leisure Centre.

11.3 Great time and effort has been spent developing links with our local amateur and professional football clubs and leagues. We want to continue to build on these relationships and develop a real trust based partnership between Wirral Council and its footballing community.

11.4 The process has seen embryonic and mutually beneficial relationships develop between the Council, its footballing community and organisations such as Carr Bridge Community Centre. In a period of extended austerity, project developments have taken on board the recommendations within the CIPFA and Central Government reports.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** Paul Hurst  
(Paul Hurst)  
telephone: 07920 537 247  
email: paulhurst@wirral.gov.uk

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 - Active Through Football consultation final report.

Appendix 2 - Sports & Physical Activity Strategy – approved at Tourism Communities Culture and Leisure committee 18<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Appendix 3 - The Wirral Plan – approved by full council in September 2021

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

These remain unchanged from the initial Tourism Communities Culture and Leisure committee report submitted and approved on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020.

### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Tourism Communities Culture and Leisure committee	23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2020