



ECONOMIC, REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

13 JUNE 2022

REPORT TITLE:	SPORTS CITY, BIDSTON DOCK
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

Sports City is a significant regeneration opportunity for land at the former Bidston Dock in Birkenhead.

The Wirral Plan 2021-2026 sets out the Council's vision to secure the best possible future for our residents, defined by the community prosperity we create and supported by our excellent people and services. This proposal directly supports the following key themes within that plan:

- A prosperous inclusive economy where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations; and
- Safe, vibrant communities where people want to live and raise their families.

This project will be a major catalyst to the Wirral Waters programme and will support economic, employment and visitor objectives in relation to the Liverpool City Region. The centrepiece will be a new 15,000 stadium for Tranmere Rovers Football Club alongside other leisure related activities. The total project cost is estimated at approximately £100m.

This matter has the potential to affect all wards.

This is a Key Decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee is recommended to:

- (1) support the Sports City Project in principle, as outlined in paragraphs 3.7 to 3.8 of this report; and
- (2) approve that delegated authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Place to
 - (a) accept a grant of £100,000 from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority as referred to in paragraph 4.1 of this report; and
 - (b) award a contract for a feasibility study into the Sports City Project, within approved budget and to the highest scoring tenderer and in accordance with the Most Economically Advantageous Tender criteria.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The proposals within this report will enable a feasibility study to be carried out to enable progress with the regeneration opportunity to be assessed. If the project were able to proceed it would not only help to safeguard the future of Tranmere Rovers FC as an important “community asset” but also to contribute to enhanced health and leisure provision as well as increased employment and long-term economic growth. The project is also seen as a catalyst for the whole Left Bank regeneration scheme and especially Wirral Waters

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Council could decide to do nothing with this opportunity but then the benefits set out in this report would not be achieved, and the site at Bidston Dock is likely to remain undeveloped for a number of years.
- 2.2 The Council could seek to identify another project lead but there is currently no other organisation that has the ability to draw the various parties together and to take this opportunity forward.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 This report sets out an ambitious, large scale and integrated regeneration project called Sports City. It will involve the Council, Tranmere Rovers FC (TRFC) and private sector operators, who collectively have a proven track record of delivery.
- 3.2 The project is a result of the strong and innovative working that has developed over recent years between TRFC and the Council culminating in a partnering agreement which was signed in 2019. The project is focussed on harnessing TRFC’s ambition to achieve a self-sustainable Championship Club and to attract capital finance whilst strategically aligning these opportunities with Wirral’s own regeneration priorities and investment in community led regeneration. TRFC is also working with the Council to sustain community resources and related provision that could potentially be lost through the significant cuts in public funding.
- 3.3 Founded in 1884, Tranmere Rovers Football Club has (save for a spell between 2014 and 2018) been a member of the Football League since 1921. Its ambition is to become a self-sustainable Championship Club, an ambition the Council supports through the partnering agreement, due to the considerable contribution to the health and well-being of the Community as well as the contribution to the local economy and profile of the Wirral. The club is an internationally recognised brand which is attracting coaches, players and visitors to Liverpool City Region through its international training and education programmes. It works extensively with local groups through its “Tranmere in the Community” programme as well as being a major employer and using local supply chains to deliver its activities.
- 3.4 Over recent years TRFC has established a reputation as a model for a professional football club. This has seen significant investment in its asset base including new

training facilities at the Solar Campus in Leasowe. In order to achieve a self-sustainable Championship club, TRFC considers that it is necessary to replace its ageing stadium at Prenton Park and move to a modern facility. Preliminary evaluation by the Club of the holistic Solar Campus project (where TRFC currently have their first team training and education facilities) and the proposal for a new stadium at Bidston Moss indicates that the project will enable TRFC to become a competitive Championship club.

- 3.5 This project was initially discussed with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) approximately two years ago. At that stage it mainly focused around a new stadium for TRFC, but due to Covid, the project did not progress. It has now been looked at again and increased in scale to include other uses. This proposal would create one of the largest single regeneration opportunities in Wirral which would enable other projects, like the rapid transit project and Wirral Waters to progress.
- 3.6 In February 2020, the LCRCA gave in-principle support for jointly funding a feasibility study with the Council for the initial proposal, but this did not progress due to the pandemic. The Council has approached the LCR Combined Authority again to progress discussions around funding for a feasibility study for the project. The LCR Combined Authority has indicated its support in principle for the feasibility study and is considering funding of £100,000 towards the feasibility study cost of £200,000.
- 3.7 The project contemplates that the Sports City will be located on land owned by Peel Land and Development at Bidston Moss. Bidston Moss is the prime and only location in Wirral for a project of this scale and size. It is a very accessible location being 5 minutes from Junction 1 of the M53 giving easy access to Wirral, Liverpool and beyond. The site adjacent to Bidston Railway station public transport routes. Situated between the communities of Birkenhead and Wallasey, it is part of the Wirral Waters development and will benefit from the proposed rapid transport system. It is a catalytic project, of scale, that will create an environment that will attract further investment to the locale. It has the potential for the following opportunities although this list is not exhaustive;
 - A 15,000 multi-purpose stadium venue with in-built hotel and conference/events facility. This will become the new home for TRFC. The stadium will be constructed in a way that allows for increased capacity should this be required in due course (up to 25,000).
 - A digital golf driving range
 - Ancillary food and retail outlets to support the uses on site
 - Opportunity to create a sports science facility.
- 3.8 Peel Land and Development supports the principle of the project and has confirmed that the land is available. They only want to be involved in this project as the owners of the land and it is for the Council and project partners to progress the project itself. Peel has also identified potential users of the site from previous contacts that they have had about this site. This in turn has brought three key delivery partners together, which in turn has provided the confidence to attract interest from several other companies bringing forward leisure proposals for the site.

- 3.9 The next stage is a feasibility study to explore the concept as set out in paragraphs 3.7 and 3.8 of this report , and to confirm the demand, develop a business and funding plan and a timescale for delivery. It is proposed to complete the feasibility study by December 2022.
- 3.10 If this project progresses to completion, TRFC site at Prenton Park, will become available for residential development. This will support delivery of the housing numbers in the Local Plan.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 A feasibility study is required to enable this opportunity to progress. The estimated cost of this is £200,000. The LCRCA has agreed in-principle to provide a grant of £100,000 to the Council (this is currently progressing through their processes) with the Council contributing the other £100,000. TRFC will benefit from the project if it goes ahead. TRFC is not in a position, at this time, to contribute towards the feasibility study cost due to costs incurred from Covid recovery, but they have agreed to fund £50,000 of the Council's cost as and when the project goes ahead in cash or in kind.
- 4.2 The Council funding is coming from the Regeneration and Place capital programme
- 4.3 The estimated cost of the project is approximately £100m. The potential sources of funding include a future sale of Prenton Park, private investment opportunities in TRFC, private sector investment from those companies who will occupy the site, and regeneration grants. The funding sources will be considered further in the feasibility study.
- 4.4 Due to the Council's current financial position a commitment was made in response to the recommendations of the recent reports published by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to ensure the Council's future financial sustainability. Therefore, the Council will not be committing any funding to progress the project unless the outcome of the feasibility study demonstrates the potential for a cashable return on investment for the Council. This includes the funding of any capital borrowing associated with the project. This will be considered as part of the full business case if the recommendation from the feasibility study is to progress.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The feasibility study will identify any legal implications and report on these, in detail, once the feasibility study is completed. Whilst the feasibility study will be commissioned by the Council, LCRCA and TRFC will be granted third party rights to enable them to rely on the study.
- 5.2 Whilst the proposed study relates to a potential arrangement involving land owned by Peel Land Property Limited and commercial arrangements with TRFC it is not considered that subsidy control is an issue. The proposed expenditure is amongst other matters informing the Council and Liverpool City Region as to the viability of this project so as to guide the Council as to the soundness of any decision to proceed with further steps beyond feasibility. The proposal does not involve any financial support to TRFC at this stage, but it could involve the Council, Peel Land

Property and TRFC gaining guidance as to the potential for future collaboration with this project.

- 5.3 If the recommendations in the report are approved, the Director of Law and Governance will settle the terms of the grant agreement with the LCRCA.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The feasibility study project will be managed from existing resources within the Regeneration and Place Directorate.
- 6.2 The feasibility study will assess the resources needed to deliver the project.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 At this stage the risk is that the feasibility study will conclude that the opportunity cannot be progressed, and the feasibility study money will be lost. However, to mitigate this the Council has:
- (1) confirmed with the landowner Peel Land and Property that the site that is earmarked for the stadium is available for this;
 - (2) confirmed the support to this project of Tranmere Rovers; and
 - (3) identified with Peel potential private sector partners who have expressed an interest in leisure and sports facilities at this location.
- 7.2 For the feasibility study, a team comprising of the Council, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Tranmere Rovers and Peel Land and Development will be formed to manage this work. The Council will procure the feasibility study.
- 7.3 A Project Board and a Risk Register will be put in place to ensure good governance if the project progresses beyond the feasibility stage.
- 7.4 If the project does not proceed beyond the feasibility study, the Council's funding contribution will need to be met from revenue funding.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Organisations representing fans of TRFC have been made aware of the proposed feasibility study. TRFC and the club will continue engagement with relevant organisations. once the outcome of the feasibility study is known.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report. Any future project plan may require an Equalities Impact Assessment and this will be part of the decision making process.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct environment and climate change implications arising out of this report. However, these will be fully accessed as part of the feasibility study and

reported back once the feasibility study is completed. A full Environmental Impact Assessment will be required if the project proceeds

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no direct community wealth implications from the feasibility study but the project, if it progresses, has the potential to create significant community wealth opportunities through the creation of a self-sustaining community club. These will form part of the feasibility study and be reported on, in detail, once the feasibility study is completed

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APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Partnering Agreement between the Council and TRFC

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
None	