

## BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Report of:** Executive Member Place

**To:** Cabinet – Tuesday, 4 September 2018

**Author:** Chris Brooks, Contract Monitoring Officer

**Subject:** Norfolk FA Artificial Grass Pitch project – Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld

**Purpose:** To consider undertaking a project to install an Artificial Grass Pitch at Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld, Thetford

### **Recommendation(s):**

- 1) To agree to explore the feasibility of replacing the existing artificial playing surface at Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld with a 3G Artificial Playing Surface supported by funding from the Football Foundation and Breckland Council.

### **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Norfolk County Football Association has approached Breckland Council regarding the feasibility of delivering a Football Foundation project at Breckland Leisure Centre and Waterworld, Thetford. The project would involve the redevelopment of the existing Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and replacing the existing sand dressed astroturf pitch with an all-weather 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP). Norfolk FA's own intelligence, coupled with the findings from the Breckland Council commissioned Evidence Base for Indoor and Built Sports and Recreational Facilities has identified the demand for improved football pitches in Thetford. The leisure centre location is a key strategic site as the infrastructure and facilities to support this project already exist at the centre, which is managed well by Parkwood Leisure. There are also strong links with Thetford Town Football Club, who are currently based at the site and there are a large number of clubs and community users in Thetford and the wider area that would benefit from the installation of an AGP which can be used year round.
- 1.2 The Football Foundation is the UK's largest sports charity and is funded by the Premier League, The Football Association and the Government. Every year the foundation directs £60m into grassroots sport. Their mission is to improve facilities, create opportunities and build communities throughout England. The foundation receives money from the Premier League and also from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport through Sport England.
- 1.3 The Football Association has just announced an initiative to provide every Local Authority in the Country with a Local Football Facilities Plan (LFFP) by 2020. Commencement of the LFFP for Breckland will be in September 2019. This project would be delivered as part of this initiative.
- 1.4 The Football Foundation gives priority to projects that are located within areas of high deprivation (as defined by the Governments Indices of Deprivation) and parts of Thetford are amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country (Index of Multiple Deprivation – Indices of Deprivation 2015 explorer).

- 1.5 Informal site meetings have taken place at Breckland Leisure Centre and Waterworld between the Football Foundation, Norfolk County FA, Breckland Council and Parkwood Leisure. The Football Foundation has advised that based on the existing facilities and taking into account all other project criteria, that this would be a credible project. The typical cost for this scale of facility is £650k, however this cost is based on a full project, there is existing infrastructure at the centre, so the proposed works would be less expensive. The Football Foundation work on a match funding basis and have indicated that their most recent projects have been awarded between 50% and 80% of project costs, with areas of high deprivation generally receiving a greater proportion of funding due to increased outcome delivery.
- 1.6 Breckland Leisure Limited has presented this proposal to the Equitix board as required under the PFI agreement; the board have given their consent to proceed with the project and had no objections at this stage. If the project were to proceed, this would need to be formalised. There is a lifecycle fund of circa £140k within the PFI project for the replacement of the playing surface; the possibility of drawing on this fund would be explored as part of a feasibility assessment.
- 1.7 The next step would be to appoint a consultant to undertake the necessary feasibility work and prepare more detailed cost estimates, along with completion of the application to the Football Foundation. The estimated cost for an approved consultant is circa £8 -10k, if the project were successful this cost would effectively be reimbursed and absorbed within the project costs.

## 2.0 **OPTIONS**

- 2.1 Approve in principle supporting this project and release funding for a consultant to undertake the full project feasibility study.
- 2.2 Do Nothing.

## 3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 The project will provide a high quality sport facility in the district and will improve the overall offer of the leisure centre, providing a facility to the community that is not available elsewhere in the town.

## 4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

- 4.1 The existing sand dressed astroturf pitch was installed at the commencement of the PFI project and is due for replacement within the next 18 months. The PFI contract only specifies a like for like replacement; this project would enable the delivery of a superior playing surface.
- 4.2 The forecast increased usage levels indicate there would be a greater use of this part of the facility (please refer to Appendix B). The centre will be able to provide training nights to a number of local teams, as well as hosting football leagues and can provide 5 a side pitches, through to full 11 a side competitive matches. During the winter months, local matches are frequently postponed as grass pitches become unsafe to play upon.
- 4.3 Provision of a top quality playing surface and enhancement of the existing leisure offer at the centre, with the potential to increase footfall across the centre, ensuring the centre remains competitive in the market place with the provision of facilities not available elsewhere in the town and surrounding area.

- 4.4 Initiatives will be delivered to encourage participation from areas of deprivation and under-represented groups.
- 4.5 The specification of fencing and security at Football Foundation facilities is greater than the existing specification; this along with the projected increased usage figures could help reduce instances of anti-social behaviour at the facility.
- 4.6 The installation of more modern flood lighting facilities could help to reduce operating costs and provide improved playing conditions.
- 4.7 Maintenance equipment is provided as part of the project. This could reduce existing maintenance costs which are carried out by external contractors; it could be more cost effective to train Parkwood Leisure staff to carry out this maintenance.
- 4.8 3G AGP playing surfaces can be suitable for other sports, such as rugby and american football. Potential interest in the use of the facility with local teams would be assessed during the feasibility study.
- 4.9 Additional activities can be catered for such as football parties and walking football. Professional clubs in the region are expected to be interested in further developing training sessions for their junior academy programmes at the centre due to the improved surface.
- 4.10 There are a large number of local affiliated football clubs and teams that would benefit from the facility. The club and team numbers as of 2017/18 season:
- Thetford Bulldogs - 15
  - Thetford Town - 8
  - Thetford Rovers - 3
  - Thetford Independents - 8
  - Mundford - 7
  - Mundford Exiles - 8
  - AFC Weeting – 1

## **5.0 THE FOOTBALL FOUNDATION TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

- 5.1 Income from all bookings can be retained by the operator of funded projects; the Football Foundation stipulates that a sinking fund must be in existence to ensure that the playing surface can be replaced as required.
- 5.2 An expected annual sinking fund contribution for a full sized 3G AGP would be £25k per year
- 5.3 Pricing structures are in place to ensure that the facility remains accessible to all groups. Based on discussions with Parkwood Leisure and Norfolk FA the anticipated pricing range is in line with the existing charges for hire of the pitch.
- 5.4 Priority allocation of pitch time on the AGP should be given to grassroots football clubs and community groups
- 5.5 Terms & Conditions of the grant are valid for a period of 21 years from the date of acceptance of the grant

- 5.6 Funding provided by the Football Foundation is a grant, not a loan
- 5.7 The works to construct the new 3G AGP will be procured through the FA's AGP Procurement Framework
- 5.8 The Project and the Facilities shall be closely monitored by the Football Foundation throughout the grant's contract (21 years) to ensure that the aims and objectives specified in the Application, Football Development Plan, Business Plan and Project Specification are being met, that the Grant Agreement is adhered to and that the Project and the Facilities represent good value for money.
- 5.9 The receiving organisation would be responsible for reporting the projects performance in accordance with the Football Foundation's Monitoring & Evaluation process

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Transformation Programme; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

### **6.1 Corporate Priorities**

- 6.1.1 The aims of this project align closely with the Council's corporate priorities, namely to "support groups and organisations to provide a range of local facilities within their communities which further improve learning opportunities, community health and community wellbeing".

### **6.2 Financial**

- 6.2.1 Please refer to the Pro Forma B (Appendix A).

### **6.3 Risk Management**

- 6.3.1 3G AGP playing surfaces are not suitable for all types of sport, this could mean that certain scheduled activities may be affected by changing the playing surface.

## **7.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

- 7.1 Thetford Boudica
- 7.2 Thetford Burrell
- 7.3 Thetford Castle
- 7.4 Thetford Priory

8.0 **ACRONYMS**

8.1 AGP - Artificial Grass Pitch

8.2 LFFP – Local Football Facilities Plan

8.3 MUGA – Multi Use Games Area

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Background papers:-           None

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**Key Decision:**               No

**Exempt Decision:**         No

**This report refers to a Discretionary Service**

**Appendices attached to this report:**

Appendix A                    Pro Forma B

Appendix B                   Existing Facility Usage and Forecast Facility Usage