

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Steve James – Executive Director

**Cllr Paul Hewett Executive Member for Property, Projects, and Procurement
Cllr Tristan Ashby Executive Member for Health & Communities**

To: Cabinet 3rd July 2023
Council 13th July 2023

Author: Ben Cooper-Welch – Contract Monitoring Officer (PFI)

Subject: Artificial Grass Pitch Project (AGP) at Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld, Thetford.

Purpose: To present findings of feasibility study to Cabinet for the consideration of making funds available to contribute towards the installation of a third-generation (3G) Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) at Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld, Thetford on the provision of a successful planning decision and funding application via the Football Foundation.

Recommendation(s):

1. That Cabinet recommend Full Council agree release of funds up to £109,000 from the Inclusive Growth reserve and the Growth and Investment Reserve for the redevelopment of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) site at Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld, Thetford with a third-generation (3G) Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) being installed as its replacement.
2. That Cabinet recommend to Full Council to accept all grant funding following football foundation application (c.£487,000) and contribution from the leisure operator (c.£100,000) and set up necessary budgets to spend.
3. That Cabinet recommend to Full Council to delegate authority to accept the terms and conditions of the football funding grant to the Executive Member for Leisure in consultation with the Assistant Director Contract and Operations
4. That delegation is given to the Assistant Director Contracts and Operations and the Council Solicitor in consultation with the Executive Member for Property, Project and Procurement to carry out negotiations with Parkwood Leisure and associated companies to obtain the best benchmarking outcome for the Council

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 It was agreed at Cabinet on 4th September 2018, that finances would be released to fund a feasibility study which would explore the replacement of the existing Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) with an all-weather 3G AGP.
- 1.2 Following this, Cabinet then agreed to commit funds to the project from community reserves.

- 1.3 Prior to this, the Norfolk County Football Association had approached Breckland Council regarding the feasibility of delivering this project in line with the Football Foundations (FF) Local Football Facilities Plan (LFFP).
- 1.4 It has been identified that Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld is a key strategic site and the infrastructure and facilities to support this project already exist at the centre, which is managed well by the leisure operator.
- 1.5 The FF gives priority to projects that are located within areas of high deprivation (as defined by the Governments Indices of Deprivation). The area surrounding Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld is amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country (Index of Multiple Deprivation – Indices of Deprivation 2015 & 2019 explorer).
- 1.6 During the Covid period this project was halted. This was due to appeals from the hockey community and also the lack of financial certainty. The agreed funds for this project being used elsewhere.
- 1.7 Post Covid, August 2022 the project was revisited. This was driven by; FF appetite to deliver the project, Appeals from the football community, reduction of hockey usage.
- 1.8 Throughout this process the Council has engaged with Thetford hockey clubs. Most notable with meetings taking place in October 2022 and February 2023 at the centre with England Hockey attending the latter.
- 1.9 England Hockey, whilst unwavering in their support for the hockey clubs, are pragmatic in their approach and understand there is a business case to consider. They recognise this is a national trend and not isolated to Thetford.
- 1.10 The Council remain committed to supporting the facilitation of a new venue for the hockey clubs which may be displaced prioritising a local solution.
- 1.11 The Council have made positive steps towards identifying a local solution and have already instructed feasibility work to be undertaken at a local site which has been met with positive engagement from all stakeholders thus far.

2.0 **OPTIONS**

- 2.1 That Cabinet recommend full council agree release of funds up to £109,000 from the Inclusive Growth reserve and the Growth and Investment Reserve for the redevelopment of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) site at Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld, Thetford with a third-generation (3G) Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) being installed as its replacement. (recommended)
- 2.2 That Cabinet recommend to full council to accept all grant funding following football foundation application (c.£487,000) and contribution from the leisure operator (c.£100,000) and set up necessary budgets to spend. (recommended)
- 2.3 That Cabinet recommend to full council to delegate authority to accept the terms and conditions of the football funding grant to the Executive Member for Leisure in consultation with the Assistant Director Contract and Operations (recommended)
- 2.4 That delegation is given to the Assistant Director Contracts and Operations in consultation with the Executive Member for Property, Projects and Procurement to carry out negotiations

with Parkwood Leisure and associated companies to obtain the best benchmarking outcome for the Council (recommended)

2.5 Do Nothing

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.1 The non-technical feasibility report delivered from TRI-Sports showed a potential significant increase in participation that could see an increase from 45% to 80-90% hire rate at the facility resulting in increased participation.

3.2 The FA training model estimates that there is need for four full sized 3G AGPs within the Breckland District area. Current supply shows there is only one full sized 3G FTP which is based at Dereham Neatherd High School (installed 2014), with a second which is a small sided pitch based at Dereham Northgate High School (installed 2016). This proposal therefore supports an identified need locally.

3.3 The existing MUGA was laid in 2006 with no evidence of ever being resurfaced. The Neil Allen Associates report from 2017 identified that the average age for a pitch carpet is 6 – 10 years dependent on the level of use. This means that the existing MUGA is at the end of its expected lifecycle and will require resurfacing in the near future.

3.4 The total project cost is £695,735. The LFFP initiative from the FF essentially allows this project to be completed and a high spec new facility to be built for (maximum) £109,000 investment from the Council.

3.5 Failing to deliver this project at this site will mean the FF will deliver this project elsewhere in the town. Should the project not progress due to Council decision and the facility be delivered elsewhere it would incur significant costs for the remainder of the PFI contract due to loss of revenue. This proposal therefore avoids significant liability costs as a result of a competing facility locally.

4.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

4.1 As stated in paragraph 3.1 it is expected that there would be a significant increase in participation with the redevelopment of the site and a 3G AGP being installed.

4.2 The feasibility study showed that Breckland levels of activity are lower than regional averages (Breckland 60.4% compared with regionally 62%). Whilst levels of inactivity were found to be higher in Breckland than the regional average (Breckland 27.7% against 25.7% regionally). This project could see an increase in activity for Breckland residents.

4.3 Excluding a sinking fund, the current surface sees revenues of c.£18,000 and costs of c.£3,000 leaving a surplus of c.£15,000 per year. Consultants have identified minimum revenue of £50,000-£55,000 on the new surface and, again excluding the sinking fund / contribution to lifecycle funding would see costs of £15,000 a year giving a surplus of c.£30,000 per year.

4.4 Avoiding loss of income compensation for the remainder of the PFI [2024 to 2039] at £25,000/annum (based on difference between above surplus calculations + further impact of loss of current football activity) = PFI UC saving figure of 25years x £25,000 = £375,000.

5.0 **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.

5.1 **Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues**

- 5.1.1 New lighting is to be fitted as a part of the project. This will reduce light pollution for local residents from the facility as LED lighting will be more focussed and create less light spillage.
- 5.1.2 The 3G pitch will include rubber crumb infill. There are several mitigations put into place to prevent contamination with surrounding green areas. Boot brushes, grate at the entrance which rubber crumb falls into on exit and will be put back on to the pitch at a later date. Most importantly there are mitigation boards. These are boards that are fixed at the bottom of the fence line ensuring infill rubber crumb does not run off through the fence onto the surrounding grassed area.
- 5.1.3 Mitigation boards are produced from a full circle recycled process and are made from recycled used astroturf / 3G carpets.

5.2 **Corporate Priorities**

- 5.2.1 Thriving Places - Investment in a new 3G AGP could provide a new Football Hub and would see the delivery of an innovative project which would benefit the local community, including local clubs, and, through correct scheduled programming, would support local residents.
- 5.2.2 Inspiring Communities - Developing this project would ensure that the local residents have access to a high-quality leisure offering. There are currently 184 affiliated teams in Breckland. Within the proximity of the site there are 11 affiliated clubs with a total of 68 teams that could potentially benefit the new facility.
- 5.2.3 Inspiring Communities – This project would enhance the provision for leisure and actively encourage our leisure provider to deliver a broad range of options targeted at increasing physical activity in the district.
- 5.2.4 Inspiring Communities – Once the project is completed, correct scheduled programming can be utilised to address social isolation creating a community hub for local residents with regular events such as walking football for older residents.

5.3 **Crime and Disorder**

- 5.3.1 Further scheduled programming can be introduced at the Football Hub which can be used to help reduce anti-social behavioural issues.

5.3.2 A 'Street League' project was initially introduced at Orford Jubilee in 2014. Following successful results in reduced anti-social behaviour the project was adopted by Birchwood in 2015 and Warrington in 2016. The Street Leagues are usually scheduled Fridays 19:00-21:00 which is traditionally peak time for ASB call outs.
<https://livewirewarrington.co.uk/news/969-friday-night-football-project>

5.4 **Equality and Diversity / Human Rights**

5.4.1 Correct programming for the facility could include such events as; Walking Football, Disability Football, and / or Girls and Women's Football to help to increase inclusivity for minority groups as well, as stated in paragraph 5.3.2 a 'Street League'.

5.5 **Financial**

5.5.1 The total project cost is estimated to be £695,735. This would be to replace the current surface with a 97m x 61m 3G AGP. This is inclusive of; contract / site preliminaries, Site clearance, excavations & Groundworks, drainage works, foundations and base, floodlighting, hard standing areas, infill retention mitigation, provision and installation of the AGP carpet, perimeter fencing (4.5m), site furniture and all goals for all pitch sizes (1x 11v11, 1x 9v9, 2x 7v7, 4x 5v5).

5.5.2 In principle, the leisure operator has agreed to contribute up to £100,000 to the project on the condition that various aspects are covered in the project which would allow them to draw funds from lifecycle. i.e. if the fence is completely replaced

5.5.3 If a pitch is well maintained the life expectancy of the surface is between 10 and 12 years.

5.5.4 As per paragraph 4.3 TRI-Sports suggest that it is reasonable that this facility could generate between £50k-55k per year as a minimum when run with correct programming and events.

5.5.5 See Proforma B

5.6 **Health & Wellbeing**

5.6.1 The TRI-Sports report identified that it is reasonable to expect that this project would see a significant increase in participation improving Breckland districts activity levels which, as stated in paragraph 4.2, are currently below regional averages.

5.6.2 As well as improving activity levels within the district, new programming will be utilised to capture new participants such as walking football. This will not only improve physical fitness but also promote social inclusion and mental wellbeing for local residents.

5.7 **Reputation**

5.7.1 By choosing to invest in this project it is likely that the council, and the leisure operator, will receive positive recognition throughout the football community, and local community for the provision of a new enhanced facility.

- 5.7.2 The project would see the site be promoted as a 'Football Hub' in the community which could attract positive interest from the media largely from a social inclusion perspective and the potential for improved involvement in physical activities by minority groups.
- 5.7.3 It is reasonable to suggest that the development of this project would see the potential interest from Norwich City Football Club and Ipswich Town Football Club, who may choose to book the facility for their youth activities.
- 5.7.4 As hockey will no longer be able to use the site for a home venue, they are likely to express their opposition for the project, however officers are working closely with England Hockey to find an alternative solution locally where possible.

5.8 Risk Management

- 5.8.1 As per paragraph 1.3 Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld has been identified as a key strategic area for a 3G AGP. It should be considered that if the project did not go ahead the FA & FF will install a 3G AGP elsewhere in, or around the Thetford area because of its geographical location and identified need.
- 5.8.2 Should the above paragraph 5.8.1 happen it could significantly impact on the footfall for Breckland Leisure Centre & Waterworld as well as being considered a missed opportunity to provide a football hub in this key location next to an existing football club.
- 5.8.3 The Council would also face significant liability costs for Loss of Income to the leisure operator for the remaining duration of the contract as the council would have been integral to the facility being delivered at the centre therefore denying the leisure operator increased revenue. (as per paragraph 4.4 this is estimated to be c.£375,00)
- 5.8.4 The council has remained in open communications with England Hockey and the hockey clubs and has already begun discussions to facilitate a potential local solution for hockey elsewhere in the town with feasibility work now being undertaken.

5.9 Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales

- 5.9.1 Stakeholders include – Football Foundation (funding body), MGAC (Technical framework provider) SiS (technical contractor), TRI-Sports (Non-Technical Consultant), Norfolk FA (local Football NGB), England Hockey (Hockey NGB) – Football Clubs, hockey Clubs, Grammar school?
- 5.9.2 Consultation would take place with football clubs as part of the TRI-Sports consultation work and hockey clubs including representation from England Hockey
- 5.9.3 Planning application for the pitch is due to be submitted late June and due for decision at committee in summer 2023. FF funding application would be submitted in October 2023, with a decision in January 2024. This would move the project into delivery in Spring of 2024.

6.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

- 6.1 Thetford Boudica
Thetford Burrell
Thetford Castle
Thetford Priory

7.0 ACRONYMS

- 7.1 3G – Third-Generation
AGP – Artificial Grass Pitch
ASB – Anti-Social Behaviour
FA – Football Association
FF – Football Foundation
FTP – Football Turf Pitch
LFFP – Local Football Facilities Plan
MUGA – Multi Use Games Area
NGB – National Governing Body
RLF – Robinson Low Francis

Background papers:- NA

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Key Decision: Yes

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Discretionary Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Financial Proforma B