

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

DECISION

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 30 OCTOBER 2018
title: ROEFIELD ARTIFICIAL GRASS PITCH PROPOSAL
submitted by: JOHN HEAP – DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: MARK BEVERIDGE – HEAD OF CULTURAL AND LEISURE SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To provide information on the options available to the Council to provide a new artificial surface at Roefield as sought by Committee in September 2018.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives – To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley.
- Corporate Priorities – To help make people's lives safer and healthier.
- Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Committee members will recall that at the September meeting a new proposal from the Lancaster Foundation and the newly formed Ribble Valley Community Sports Trust was discussed. The Committee declined the proposal and asked officers to prepare options for the Council to provide a new artificial surface facility at Roefield. This report provides those options.

2.2 The consensus view of Committee and officers throughout previous discussions on the Roefield project is that an improvement of AGP facilities is a good idea. Given the limitations of natural grass pitches in the North West during the winter time and the flexibility and intensive use which an AGP can be put to compared to grass.

2.3 The Council's existing artificial surface at Roefield is deteriorating and will, if not improved, ultimately become unfit to use and have to be closed and removed. This surface was refurbished with the assistance of Sport England funding in 2015, however the manufacturer has subsequently gone out of business, although at the time they were an approved supplier on the Sport England list.

2.4 The current provision is well used by a variety of clubs, casual bookings and schools, however there is no full size 3G playing pitch fully available for community use in the Borough. Something which the Football Association have themselves acknowledged to the Council and the many affiliated football clubs in the Borough.

2.5 A 3G facility refers to third generation and is the modern development of the original plastic and sand surfaces of the 1980s. The current generation of pitches use different yarns to replicate the play-ability of natural grass and have a rubber based compound for the infill, giving a more natural bounce and greater safety for players. Such pitches are now approved for all levels of play up to and including professional for both football and rugby.

- 2.6 Sport and leisure is not a statutory function for any Local Authority, the amount that is provided by individual authorities is dependent on a variety of factors. Although there is no question that there are health and other benefits from participating in sport and leisure, the financial pressure on local authorities in recent years has seen a number of Authorities close their facilities or if already delivered by a trust, significantly reduce or remove the subsidy previously provided to them, in order that other priority service can be maintained.

3. THE OPTIONS

There are 2 options available to the Council in respect of the provision of an artificial grass pitch (AGP) at Roefield:

- A. The Council undertake the building and operation of a single full-size 3G AGP and a refurbishment of the existing artificial surfaces at Roefield, which is part 3G and part multi-purpose.
- B. The Council undertake the building and operation of a full size 3G AGP and approximately half size 3G AGP, based on the existing area, which would remove the current multi-sports surface which is there. (Similar to what was proposed in September).

4. OPTION EVALUATION

- 4.1 In evaluating the options which involve a new build or refurbishment of the existing surface, officers have been in touch with local sports clubs and schools to try and establish what their needs would be and how these translate into demand. Any AGP unless part of an education site and used by the community outside the school day, will as is the case at Roefield have limited weekday use. Although that can be maximised through working with schools and community groups to develop use, it will not generate the demand or the income of peak time periods. Indeed, day time use will be a marginal benefit financially, because most schools for example will incur significant costs simply transporting their pupils to the site. Nonetheless, the benefits from both sports development, health and educational perspectives for the pupils are significant. The demand for bookings from clubs has for the purposes of evaluating the options been cautiously applied from a financial perspective, to avoid over stating likely income.
- 4.2 Both the options have an impact on the existing artificial cricket wicket. Following discussions with the current club they would be unconcerned by the loss of the current artificial wicket, if they had access to nets on an artificial surface. Such an arrangement could either be achieved by a complete new build with the associated costs of providing a new base, fencing etc. such an option would cost upwards of £45k, however, it is feasible to build it into option A below. It is not possible to play cricket on a 3G surface and neither is it feasible to put a mat down on such a surface to provide a wicket.
- 4.3 In the options outlined the specifications for the full size 3G surface are the same, it would allow football and rugby to be played, meeting the relevant safety requirements of both sports, by means of a shock-pad. (Though a pad is not a FA requirement for football at amateur level). For rugby it would be training only, including full contact, because there is no practical way of incorporating the goals alongside football which would be the predominant sport for the 3G surfaces. However it does allow for tag rugby to be played competitively.
- 4.4 The financial figures for the options take account of allowing 10% of the space for community use, which enables the Council to specifically help groups who would

otherwise may not be able to afford to hire the space; for example, working with the Youth service and the police to help provide diversionary activities for young people in the Borough which would extend beyond simply football. The provision of a large AGP allows for a range of activities to be provided year round largely unaffected by the weather.

- 4.5 The illustrative baseline income figure which has been used to give a feel for the likely financial performance of the pitches, is the one provided by the RVCST and Lancaster partnership previously. The partnership put considerable work into their proposal, therefore it makes sense to use their work, as officers are at an early stage of more detailed planning. Members will have seen the helpful correspondence from the partnership which offers the Council the benefit of the work they have undertaken on their proposal so far.

4.6 Option A

This would provide a full size AGP, all 3G, plus refurbishment of the existing space with a combination of 3G and a multi purpose surface. Retention of the existing space, refurbished with new fencing, lighting and surfaces is more cost effective than rebuilding a new area from scratch. This option would seek to address the operating issues experienced on the existing surface to avoid any potential run off from the grass areas leading to contamination of the surfaces with mud and silt. Having two areas of 3G and a multi-purpose surface allows for football, cricket, tennis, netball, hockey and basketball to be played, some competitively others as training.

The downside of this option is that the existing space does not meet the FA requirements to accommodate small side games (5v5 or 7v7). It is large enough for casual football and training which takes place now and the full size pitch provides the space for these to be played. The upside is that having a multi-purpose surface provides for a wider range of activities than 3G can provide for. This would enable a larger cross section of the community to benefit from the investment than would be case with 3G alone.

The outline capital cost for this is £853k

4.7 Option B

This would see the existing facility replaced with a new surface one of a similar size though specifically just 3G, allowing two 7v7 or one 9v9 games to be accommodated, plus a full size AGP. It does not require the existing surface to be made larger, though it does remove the option of a multi-sport surface as the new surface would be 3G entirely. This restricts the type of activity to those which are compatible with 3G, from a community development and access perspective this is not as flexible as option B. It does of course provide more playing surface for football in particular.

The outline cost for this is £799k

- 4.8 Of the two options outlined the one which is felt to provide the greatest community benefit is option A, because it incorporates a multipurpose surface allowing for a wider range of activities to be played, though either of the options will improve significantly upon the existing provision and enhance the provision for sport and recreation in the Borough.

- 4.9 Neither of these options includes toilet provision which was an identified concern that emerged during discussions about the proposal before Committee in September. This might be something which members wish to consider as part of a scheme the Council may embark on.

5 CAPITAL PROGRAMME IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Two proposals have been provided within this report for consideration by members. Subject to the considerations and observations of members it is proposed to develop the preferred option of members into a firm capital scheme for further consideration by Policy and Finance Committee.
- 5.2 A high level outline of the capital costs have been included within the report, and further consideration will need to be made by Policy and Finance committee on how this is financed, be that from earmarked reserves, borrowing, or any external funding should that be shown to be available. Initial indications as shown in section 4 are that external funding seems unlikely.

6 REVENUE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Early indications are that the revenue costs of both options will be very similar. Further detailed work will need to be undertaken to sit alongside the detailed capital scheme proposal that is submitted to Policy and Finance Committee.
- 6.2 Indications at this stage are that income may be in the region of just over £100,000 per annum, with recurring annual revenue costs of approximately £60,000, excluding depreciation and internal staff recharges and support services.
- 6.3 This is a very early indicative picture, and much more detailed work will need to be undertaken before your next meeting.

7 OTHER ISSUES

- 7.1 The project will be a facility for the whole Borough, and, although the location may not be convenient for clubs in Whalley or Longridge, for example, we would hope to work closely with them in terms of programming.
- 7.2 If the Council choose to build a new facility the existing one would be maintained until the commencement of the contract to build. It may be possible depending upon the programme of work established by the successful contractor and option chosen, for the existing facility to be maintained until the full size AGP was constructed, thus enabling a facility to be offered throughout the construction period.

8 RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – It is likely that any capital scheme that results from the two proposals that have been put forward to committee for consideration will be funded from earmarked reserves, borrowing, or any external funding should that be shown to be available.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – these will be brought to your next meeting, depending upon which option, if any, is chosen to be progressed.
- Reputation – The provision of sport is not a statutory requirement for local authorities. However following the decision of the Committee in September there has been considerable adverse social media comments made about the Council, with regard to the outcome. Yet the Council has over the last few years sought to improve the grass pitch provision through the purchase of new goals, investment in machinery to improve drainage on pitches and public open spaces, new line marking machines and the investment to improve the previous sand based

surfaces with the current 3G surface at Roefield. The debate which began following the initial offer by the Lancaster Foundation over two years ago, has undoubtedly led to the current situation and provides an opportunity for the Council, if it wishes, to respond in a very positive manner, by investing in a project which would when built offer residents across the Borough the chance to access the very best in facilities.

- Equality and Diversity – Both options are fully inclusive.

9 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 9.1 Considers the report and options contained, and determines which, if any, it would like to recommend to Policy and Finance to be considered as a capital bid for 2019/20.
- 9.2 Considers whether a further development including toilet facilities should be explored and brought to a future meeting of Committee.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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