

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-042-2008/09.
Date of meeting: 6 October 2008.



Portfolio: Leisure and Young People.
Subject: Ongar Leisure Centre - Proposed Development of Playing Fields.
Responsible Officer: Julie Chandler (01992-564214).
Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992-564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That further to their earlier agreement in principle, the Cabinet now agree to actively pursue the development of the Playing Fields at Ongar Leisure Centre, to enable the provision of a range of facilities that will be used to actively address local issues of health inequality and disadvantage, and to that end, that:

(a) Officers are authorised to formally bid for the external funding available in the form of £727,000 from the Football Foundation and £200,000 from Essex Football Association, to contribute towards the overall costs; and

(b) that the Cabinet seeks additional Capital Provision of £507,000 from the Council's Capital Programme for the balance of the works; and

(c) that the revenue implications of the project are incorporated into the budget process 2009/10;

Executive Summary:

A report was presented to Members in September 2006 outlining the potential for development of playing pitch facilities at Ongar Campus Fields.

In early 2007, Leisure Services produced a District Playing Pitch Strategy that identified a lack of good quality playing pitches in the District and particularly in the north. It also highlighted the opportunity for financial support from the Football Foundation to establish a Multi-Sport hub site at Ongar, which would include junior, youth and adult facilities for football, rugby, athletics and cricket. Since this time, a strong indication has been received from the Essex Football Association, that a further contribution for the project of £200,000 will be available as part of the Olympic 2012 Legacy funding.

The proposed development of Ongar Campus Fields therefore has the opportunity to attract significant financial support from the Football Foundation and the Essex Football Association.

The favoured timescale for submission of a funding application to the Football Foundation (which would be the major funding agency) is within the next 3 – 6 months, with a view to development commencing at Ongar in the next 6 – 12 months.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Shelley Ward within Ongar is highlighted as a super output area, in terms of low income, unemployment and some health inequalities including above average obesity levels. Youth anti-social behaviour has recently increased locally and it is anticipated that the planned facilities at Ongar Campus will provide a much needed, accessible resource for young people, along with opportunities to address the health and well being of people of all ages in the locality.

It is likely that the Football Foundation will contribute up to 50% of the overall Project funding for the proposed developments at Ongar Campus Fields on the proviso that a 3rd Generation synthetic turf pitch is included in the new facilities. However, to meet with the timescales indicated by colleagues at the Football Foundation, The Council needs to submit a full funding application within the next 3 months. In addition, Essex Football Association (via Essex County Council) has promised a contribution of £200k towards the development as part of the 2012 Legacy funding, but this must be allocated by March 2009. The application to the Football Foundation will need confirmation of other match funding, including a capital contribution from The Council.

Other Options for Action:

The Football Foundation and Essex Football Association will withdraw their offer of funding for the Ongar development, if the Council does not provide match funding.

Report:

1. The School playing fields, formerly serving Ongar Comprehensive, were transferred from Essex County Council to the District Council in 2003, at the time of re-development of the campus site.
2. Although the pitches attract weekly football team training and one-off casual bookings, the facility is currently very underutilised and the pitches are of poor to average quality.
3. A Cabinet Report was submitted in September 2006 outlining potential development opportunities for Ongar Campus Fields. Cabinet supported in principle the range of improvements proposed for the playing fields, including the provision of a multi-sport site offering quality facilities and maximising participation in sport by people of all ages and abilities.
4. Detailed discussions have taken place with the Football Foundation; Essex Football Association and other National Governing Bodies regarding the best use of the site as a multi-sport facility, and a feasibility study (including full soil tests) has been undertaken by STRI (Sports Turf Services Ltd).
5. The results of these investigations have indicated that the playing fields could accommodate a good cross section of sports for both juniors, young people and adults, including; a soccer centre for juniors/youth/girls and women; tag (junior) rugby for boys and girls; junior/youth athletics; junior/youth and adult cricket, and men's training/casual football.
6. The prospective partners (including West Essex PCT) are keen to support the development of a wide range of new sport and health improvement initiatives on the site, to address particular health issues including obesity, with Shelley Ward presenting as above the national average for this. This work would be developed in collaboration with the new Health Centre that is currently under discussion, for the Ongar War Memorial site.

7. The infrastructure needed for this proposed variety of provision would require the installation of a '3rd Generation' artificial pitch with floodlights; a cricket square; levelling and drainage of the existing grass areas and marking of respective pitches/track. To meet with the Football Foundation funding requirements, it would also be necessary to construct a 4 x changing room pavilion with toilets, kitchen and 'open area' for the range of groups involved. However, recent discussions with Essex County Council have raised the opportunity to extend the Youth Club building that is situated adjacent to the playing fields at Ongar, to accommodate changing facilities and this would meet with Football Foundation approval.

8. Whether a new pavilion is built, or the current Youth Club is extended, it is planned for this building to have a variety of alternative daytime uses, including; coach education and skills training, delivery of joint EFDC & PCT initiatives such as obesity reduction for children and adults and stop smoking courses, and general fitness programmes for people that would not initially be confident in using Leisure Centre facilities.

9. Other existing facilities on the site include a floodlit all weather area, which is the size of two tennis courts but in need of resurfacing and improvement. This area could easily be extended to accommodate a netball court size multi use games area and would provide the opportunity for the introduction and development of girls and women's netball, as well as a range of other games.

10. SLM Ltd. have expressed an interest in adding the new facilities to their existing contract for Ongar Leisure Centre, with the company having responsibility for managing, administering and maintaining the new facilities at Ongar. As part of this agreement, The Council's Sports Development Team would have guaranteed elements of use, for the provision of social inclusion programmes and targeted work with residents of Shelley, Ongar.

Resource Implications:

Full Breakdown Contained at Appendix 1 of the Report

Summary:

Total Project Capital Cost	1,454,000.00
Football Foundation	727,000.00
Essex Football Association (Via ECC)	200,000.00
Existing provision in the Capital Programme	20,000.00

EFDC Capital contribution to meet shortfall of £507,000 for development of facilities on the site.

Revenue – Additional Income of £17,400 per annum.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Pavilion: if a new pavilion is built on the site, The Council's Sports Development team would manage programming for this. Cleaning would be undertaken as part of the contract with SLM. However, if the existing Youth Club Building is utilised, Essex County Council will continue to own and manage the building, but the new changing facilities will be leased to the Council at a peppercorn rent.

Astro-turf Pitch and Playing Pitches: Bookings, administration and management of the pitch facilities would be undertaken by SLM as part of an agreed contract.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

It is planned to particularly target children, young people and families from the Shelley Estate (identified as a 'Super Output' area with respect to deprivation and low income) in Ongar, to use the new facilities, This will be addressed through working in conjunction with partners including West Essex Primary Care Trust and ECC to identify key families in need of support to improve their health and well being.

It is also anticipated that new synthetic turf pitch will attract use by young people from the Ongar area and therefore, specific time slots will be allocated to development work by Tottenham Hotspur Foundation, to encourage positive activity and diversion from anti-social behaviour. In addition, a low cost option for hiring the pitch is proposed for groups of young people not wishing to participate in 'organised' sessions

Consultation Undertaken:

Extensive consultation with local clubs and stakeholders through the Playing Pitch Strategy Development.

STRI Sports Turf Services were commissioned to undertake an initial feasibility study on the proposed improvements. The feasibility study involved a visit to the playing fields in order to assess the current condition of the existing pitch areas, in terms of surface levels; nature of the soil profile; vegetation cover and drainage characteristics. Following the site appraisal, a report was produced summarising the findings and recommendations on improving the pitches as considered appropriate, together with the likely costs involved.

Current and potential users of the site have been consulted on the proposals for the development at Ongar and the current users Ongar Juniors Football Club, are keen to develop their club further using the new facilities.

Tottenham Hotspur Foundation (who have been working extensively with the Council on social inclusion programmes over the last year) have indicated a strong interest in supporting multi-sport development on the site, to include specific inclusion projects for young people living in the area.

Discussions have taken place with SLM Ltd. regarding management of bookings for the proposed All Weather Pitch and casual booking of grass pitches, and a formal agreement would be drawn up for this purpose and added to SLM's contract with the Council.

Sport England have identified the Ongar Site as a key site in meeting the loss of playing fields at St John's School, Epping.

Background Papers:

Epping Forest Playing Pitch Strategy, STRI Feasibility Study and Report.

Impact Assessments:

None.

Appendix 1

Indicative Costs of Development (Prices do not include VAT)

The STRI recommendation for maximizing use of the site includes:

Contract Preliminaries (inc. CDM)	6,000.00
Site set-up, access, compound, protective fencing etc.	4,000.00
Construction of 3 rd Generation synthetic turf pitch	460,000.00
Drainage, levelling, seeding, dressing & topping x3	289,000.00
Installation of a natural and synthetic cricket square	38,000.00
Replacement of MUGA surfacing	60,000.00
Installation of 4 x changing room pavilion	450,000.00
Purchase of AWP surface maintenance machine	10,000.00
Goals/equipment	5,000.00
*10% contingency – (recommended by STRI)	132,200.00

Total Capital Cost **1,454,000.00**

Estimated Revenue Costs:

Annual maintenance programme for grass pitches/site	25,000.00
Annual Maintenance for AWP	8,500.00
Floodlighting	8,000.00
Floodlighting maintenance and repairs	2,000.00
Sinking Fund for replacement of surface Yr 12	15,000.00
Sinking Fund for replacement fencing after 24 yrs	2,000.00
Annual budget for cleaning pavilion/changing facilities	3,000.00
Annual maintenance of Pavilion	2,500.00

Total Revenue Cost **66,000.00**

Estimated Maximum Income:

The majority of potential annual income will be generated through the Astro-turf pitch.

Weekday usage 6pm – 10pm x 5 days (20 hrs x 40 wks)	56,000.00
Weekend usage 4 hrs x 2 days (8hrs x 40 wks)	22,400.00

*These estimates include consideration for variation in prices for floodlighting etc. based on 70% of pitch hire rates currently charged at the nearest 3rd Generation Astro - turf facility in Harlow.

Estimated Income for grass pitches

Seasonal hire to football club/s	4,000.00
Casual/one - off bookings	1,000.00

Income Total **83,400.00**