

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference:** C-079-2009/10  
**Date of meeting:** 1 February 2010



**Portfolio:** Leisure & Well Being  
**Subject:** Ongar Playing Fields Development/ Waltham Abbey Town Mead  
**Responsible Officer:** Julie Chandler (01992 564214).  
**Democratic Services Officer:** Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) That Cabinet agrees that as the anticipated external funding is not available and as new playing pitch facilities have recently been installed in neighbouring authority areas, the proposed development of the Ongar Leisure Centre pitches, is no longer viable.**
- (2) That Cabinet agrees 'in principle', subject to further negotiations with Waltham Abbey Town Council with respect to management arrangements and income share, to re-allocate the £527,000 Capital Provision for the Ongar Scheme to provide a new full sized third generation floodlit all-weather pitch at Town Mead Recreation Ground, Waltham Abbey.**
- (3) That a further report on the full revenue consequences, as a result of negotiations with Waltham Abbey Town Council, be brought to Cabinet before final approval is given to proceed to tender.**
- (4) That, if required, approval is given for a planning application to be submitted at the appropriate time for the new floodlit pitch at Town Mead Recreation Ground.**

### **Executive Summary:**

The Council undertook a comprehensive Playing Pitch Strategy for the District in 2007/08. The Study highlighted a shortage of football pitches in key locations across the district and in particular junior and youth facilities in the Ongar area. These findings concurred with Essex Football Associations' assessment of football pitch provision in terms of the county as a whole.

To address this identified lack of provision, officers proceeded to investigate the feasibility of external funding opportunities. As a result, a report was formally approved by Cabinet on 6 October 2008, to actively pursue the development of the Playing Fields at Ongar Leisure Centre. As part of this report, Cabinet also agreed to commit in principle, a sum up to a maximum of £527,000 Capital Provision from the Council's Capital Programme, dependent on the level of external funding being obtained.

Following a series of meetings with key funders, a bid for £727,000 was submitted to the Football Foundation and a £200,000 bid was made to Essex Football Association. Officers were in contact with the Football Foundation throughout the 12 month assessment of the bid

and were surprised and disappointed to be notified, that following a sudden change in funding criteria and unexpected shortages in availability of funding, the Council's submission had been rejected. A subsequent submission was then made to Sport England's Rural Fund, which appeared to meet all of the set requirements, but this bid was also unsuccessful. The Council was however successful in its bid to Essex Football Association for £200,000 as part of the Essex County Council 2012 Legacy Funding, but due to the delays in receiving notification from the other funders, could not meet the installation timescales required.

As stated above, £527,000 has already been included within the Capital Programme 2010/11 earmarked for the Ongar Playing Fields project. Members' views are being sought as to whether the scheme should go ahead, as the original in principle decision was predicted on the expectation that external capital funding would be available. In addition, demand for all weather facilities has reduced in Ongar, with the provision of new additional facilities in the adjoining area of Brentwood.

In light of the Council's medium term financial forecast, officers have investigated other opportunities to meet with the Council's desire to only provide Capital funding towards revenue generating schemes. As such, there is potential for the installation of a new Astroturf facility in Waltham Abbey that is expected to meet this criteria.

#### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

- The anticipated external funding for the development of playing pitches at Ongar Leisure Centre is not available.
- The strategic need for an all-weather pitch in Ongar has been greatly reduced by additional provision in Brentwood.
- Football facilities at Townmead Sports Ground in Waltham Abbey are currently utilised for training but in significant need of improvement; the installation of a 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Astroturf Pitch would enable increased use by local groups.
- A new Astroturf facility in Waltham Abbey would encourage and enable people to be more physically active, therefore helping to reduce health inequalities.
- The new facility would be used by the Council to encourage positive activity by young people to address local issues of anti-social behaviour.

#### **Other Options for Action:**

A decision is taken not to use the funding allocated to Ongar Playing Fields within the Capital Programme, or allocate to another non Leisure capital priority.

#### **Report:**

1. A report was formally approved by the Cabinet on 6 October 2008 to actively pursue the development of the Playing Fields at Ongar Leisure Centre, to enable the provision of a range of outdoor sports facilities. Officers were authorised to formally bid for external funding in the form of £727,000 from the Football Foundation and £200,000 from Essex Football Association.

2. The Cabinet additionally agreed, in principle, to provide Capital Provision from the Council's Capital Programme for the balance of the works up to a maximum of £527,000, but with a clear expectation that external funding would meet the majority of the costs of the

development.

3. Following detailed discussions with the Football Foundation; Essex Football Association and Sport England regarding the best use of the site, an external funding application was developed and a feasibility study (including full soil tests) was undertaken by STRI (Sports Turf Services Ltd). However due to the current economic conditions; a restructure, and budget cuts at the Football Foundation, the Council's application was unexpectedly rejected. As such, the funders are no longer in a position to provide any grant aid towards the project.

4. In an attempt to secure external support, a further application was submitted to Sport England's Rural Communities Fund, however, this was heavily over-subscribed (fifteen times over the amount of funding available) and the Council's application did not progress to stage 2. As an unfortunate consequence of this and the Council's inability to meet key start on site deadlines, the Essex FA has also now withdrawn their offer of £200,000 funding.

5. During this period of negotiation with funders, a new full size floodlit synthetic football pitch was installed in Brentwood district, through a Charitable Trust. In addition, there are also currently plans to construct a further pitch in another location in Brentwood in 2010. This completely changes the strategic facility need requirements in the Ongar area and, therefore, opportunities for attracting any other funding are highly unlikely.

6. However, as the Council had adopted a policy that capital investment should generate a revenue return, officers have considered opportunities elsewhere in the District where a new sports facility could provide revenue for the Council. One such project considered to be a viable option is a new synthetic pitch in Waltham Abbey recreation ground at Town Mead.

7. Meetings have been held with Waltham Abbey Town Council and a site visit was made to Town Mead, where there is currently a floodlit all weather pitch that is badly in need of replacement. This facility is currently used as a training facility, but matches are unable to be played on it due to the quality of the pitch surface. If a new 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation pitch, as originally envisaged for Ongar, was installed, maximum use could be made of the facility. Such 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation pitches have the advantage that they are able to accommodate official matches and league games for all ages.

8. The Town Council would be interested in continuing with management of the facility, but the Council would secure a regular amount of pitch time to develop daytime usage including; coach education and skills training, schools and college use, delivery of partnership work such as Obesity reduction for children and adults and general fitness programmes. The pitch would also be used in the early evening for afterschool coaching and training. The existing infrastructure at Townmead would support and complement the development and delivery of such programmes.

9. Further and more detailed meetings would need to be held with Waltham Abbey Town Council (WATC) to determine the basis for a profit share agreement in respect of the proposed facility. These negotiations would need to take account of ongoing costs of maintaining the facility and administration of bookings which would be undertaken by WATC, along with the need to retain a Sinking Fund for replacement of the pitch surface after 10 years and the perimeter fencing after 15 years (it is anticipated that the sinking fund would be retained by the Council at £20,700 per annum). Any agreement would also need to consider the level of income currently generated by WATC for the existing pitches in use, balanced against the Council's investment in the new facility.

## Resource Implications:

Based on potential development at Townmead, Waltham Abbey:

### Indicative Costs of Development (Prices do not include VAT)

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| Contract Preliminaries (inc. CDM)                               | 6,000          |
| Site set-up, access, compound, protective fencing etc.          | 4,000          |
| Construction of 3 <sup>rd</sup> Generation synthetic turf pitch | 460,000        |
| Purchase of AWP surface maintenance machine                     | 10,000         |
| Goals/equipment   | 5,000          |
| Contingency – (recommended by STRI)                             | 36,500         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>527,000</b> |

### \*Indicative Revenue Implications:

|                                       |               |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Annual Maintenance for AWP            | 10,000        |
| Floodlighting                         | 6,000         |
| Floodlighting maintenance and repairs | 4,000         |
| Bookings Admin                        | 3,500         |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>23,500</b> |

### \*Potential Income - based at £70 per hour

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Weekday usage 6pm – 10pm x 5 days (20 hrs x 40 wks)    | 56,000        |
| Estimated weekend usage 4 hrs x 2 days (8hrs x 40 wks) | 22,400        |
| <b>Total Income</b>                                    | <b>78,400</b> |

\*The above figures are estimates and include consideration for variation in prices for floodlighting etc. Income is based on 70% of pitch hire rates currently charged at the nearest 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation facility.

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| <b>Sinking Fund per annum</b> – replacement of pitch surface (after 10 years) | 17,500 |
| - replacement of fencing (after 15 years)                                     | 3,200  |

### Potential profit £34,200

|                                    |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| EFDC potential profit share income | 17,100 |
| Plus Sinking Fund per annum        | 20,700 |

|                      |               |
|----------------------|---------------|
| <b>Total to EFDC</b> | <b>37,800</b> |
|----------------------|---------------|

## Legal and Governance Implications:

Waltham Abbey Town Council currently manages the Townmead facility and they would be responsible for managing the new facility. A lease or service level agreement would need to be developed by Epping Forest District Council and Waltham Abbey Town Council detailing specific responsibilities and financial implications.

## Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

It is planned to particularly target children, young people and families from Waltham Abbey 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

Waltham Abbey 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.
- Detailed discussions with Essex FA and the Football Foundation over both proposed areas. No financial assistance will be giving to either site.
- Current and potential users of the site have been consulted on the proposals for the development at Ongar and Townmead, Waltham Abbey.
- Site visit and meeting with Waltham Abbey Town Council, who are supportive and keen to progress the project at Townmead, Waltham Abbey.
- 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.

### **Background Papers:**

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

### **Impact Assessments:**

#### Risk Management

A risk management exercise has been carried out as part of this report and it has been identified that if the proposals at Ongar were developed there would be greater risk to the Council as to whether the development would become sustainable as compared to the proposed developments at Townmead, Waltham Abbey.

#### Equality and Diversity:

*Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?* No

*Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?* N/A

*What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?*

N/A.

*How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?*

N/A.