

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report Reference: C/045/2006-07.**

**Date of meeting: 4 September 2006.**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio: Leisure and Young People.**

**Subject: Ongar Leisure Centre Playing Fields - Proposed improvements.**

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### **Recommendations:**

**(1) That the range of improvements proposed for the Playing Fields at the rear of Ongar Leisure Centre, providing a multi-sports site offering quality facilities and maximising participation in sport by people of all ages and abilities, be supported in principle;**

**(2) That A further report be submitted to a future meeting providing further details on the projected cost of each option to include:**

**(a) revenue consequences; and**

**(b) the level of external financial support being made available to support the project; and**

**(3) That, dependent upon the outcome of the further feasibility work, a bid for resources to be made available within the Council's capital programme to meet any short-fall in external funding be considered.**

### **Background:**

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 the re-development of the campus site. Up until this point the pitches had very little community use however they now are marked out for football and have been available for club and private hire via Ongar Leisure Centre. The Playing Fields are now maintained by Leisure Services Grounds Maintenance Service. The area currently accommodates 3 full size football pitches, with one of these being potentially a very good quality match pitch.
2. Although the pitches now attract weekly football team training and one-off casual bookings, the facility is still very under-utilised with high untapped potential. There is considerable scope for a range of future development opportunities, including the establishment of the site as a Multi- Sport Hub Site (MSHS). Such facilities are currently seen as the way forward for development of sport in the UK and are steadily increasing in numbers, following successful examples set by other countries in Europe and around the world.

### **Proposal:**

3. The Ongar Playing Fields site could accommodate a MSHS with the provision of a good cross section of sports for juniors, young people and adults, including for example; 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.

4. The infrastructure needed for this range of provision would require the installation of a cricket square, levelling of the existing grass areas and marking of respective pitches/track. 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. During the daytime, this building could have a variety of alternative 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 generally wish to access Leisure Centre facilities.
5. The limited facilities currently available also include a floodlit all weather area, which is the size of two tennis courts, but in need of resurfacing and improvement. This area could be extended to accommodate a netball court size multi use games area. This would provide a badly needed opportunity for the introduction and development of girls and women's netball, as well as a range of other games.

#### **Identification of Need:**

6. The Council's Sports Development Team has carried out a range of sports specific work over the last few years at local schools in the area. The particular sports highlighted have been selected specifically because of their popularity amongst children and young people and their ability to be provided on a seasonal rotational basis.
7. The sports identified are not widely available in the area. Several of the sports lend themselves to participation by women and girls, who are a key target group nationally for both sport and health sectors. This is due to the significant drop off in participation in physical activity by girls in their teenage years and particularly after leaving secondary school.
8. Local schools including those in the more rural locations have expressed an interest in using the proposed facilities for a range of sports events, including tag rugby festivals, athletics and football events.
9. In addition, a range of research work has already been carried out in conjunction with voluntary sports clubs and the Essex FA. This has identified the need and desire for an all weather Astroturf pitch in the north of the district, that would be available for training and local matches for juniors and seniors. The alternative nearest facilities of this kind are in Harlow and Brentwood. The Football Foundation, major funders of football facilities have been consulted and they are also keen for a junior soccer centre to be established at the site.

#### **Funding Opportunities:**

10. Preliminary discussions have taken place with The Football Foundation regarding the potential for assistance with funding towards a State of the Art (Third Generation) full sized Astroturf Pitch and pavilion. As part of the package revenue funding may also be available, to appoint on a Fixed Term Contract, a Development Officer to manage, co-ordinate and maximise the use of any new facilities. The project has subsequently been included on Essex FA 's 5 year Facilities Development Plan (2005- 2009), pending any formal application.
11. In addition to the potential financial support from the Football Foundation which can be up to 50% of the total costs, Leisure Services has been in discussion with Sport England with regard to the possibility of securing 106 funding towards re-establishment of playing pitches in the District, linked to the outcome of the St. John's School, Epping Development proposal.

12. If this proposal was to proceed, it is anticipated that the management of the Astro turf and casual pitch bookings would be undertaken by SLM (Sports & Leisure Management) at Ongar Leisure Centre and the programme of daytime activities based within the pavilion and early evening junior courses would be managed and delivered by the MCHS Development Officer.

**Statement in Support of Recommended Action:**

13. The playing fields at the rear of Ongar Leisure Centre have the potential to become the first Multi-Sport Hub Site in Essex and therefore become an example of good practice in Local Authority Sports provision. The planned facilities and programmes meet a wide range of health and physical activity targets, including reduction in childhood and adult obesity and involvement of girls and women in sport and leisure. The benefit of establishing a multi-sport facility include, whole family involvement, social inclusion and community cohesion.
14. The Football Foundation have also indicated that they will not provide 50% funding towards the proposed development without the provision of a 4 x changing room pavilion and Third Age Astro turf pitch.

**Other Options for Action:**

15. The Council continues to maintain the pitches to a basic standard to facilitate the current relatively low levels of usage.
16. Members agree in principle the proposal to improve Ongar Playing Fields by means of a Multi-Sport Hub Site, thus maximising the opportunities for participation in sport for the local community. The final level and range of provision to be determined on receipt of more detailed evaluation of cost and the likely level of external funding contributions.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

17. Local Schools, local Sports Clubs, Essex Football Association, The Football Foundation, Sport England and Sports and Leisure Management Limited (The Council's Leisure Management Contractor)

**Resource implications:**

**Budget provision:** *Indicative Capital Costs* - Indicative costs have been established for the improvement of the site illustrating the full improvement scheme and dependent on the availability of funding a set of three sub-options which whilst not delivering the maximum potential benefits would still produce a valuable community resource. It is hoped to generate between 75% and 80% of the cost through external funding.

**FULL IMPROVEMENT SCHEME**

Astro turf Pitch	450,000.00
Pavilion	450,000.00
Netball/MUGA	60,000.00
Installation of Cricket Wicket	20,000.00
Improvement of pitches and marking	100,000.00
Installation of spectator stand	10,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,090,000.00</b>

**OPTION 1 (minus Astro turf Pitch)**

Pavilion	450,000.00
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Netball/MUGA	60,000.00
Installation of Cricket Wicket	20,000.00
Improvement of pitches and marking	100,000.00
Installation of spectator stand	10,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>640,000.00</b>

OPTION 2 (minus Astroturf Pitch and smaller pavilion)

Pavilion (2 x changing room)	250,000.00
Netball/MUGA	60,000.00
Installation of Cricket Wicket	20,000.00
Improvement of pitches and marking	100,000.00
Installation of spectator stand	10,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>440,000.00</b>

OPTION 3 (upgrade current pitches)

Improvement of pitches and marking	100,000.00
Installation of spectator stand	10,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>110,000.00</b>

*Revenue* - A Business Plan will be developed as part of the funding applications, however particularly if the all weather facilities are provided it is envisaged that the site could generate an annual surplus.

**Personnel:** In order to maximise the site there is also an opportunity through external funding to employ a Development Officer on a three year fixed term contract. A range of coaching staff may also need to be engaged on a casual basis to take courses etc. The cost of these to be met by participants. Development Officer ( F/T 3 year post) £75,000 externally funded.

**Land:** The scheme would also require relevant planning consent.

**Community Plan/BVPP reference:** Leisure and Young People Portfolio Key Aim to provide accessible leisure opportunities to enable people to lead a healthy and active life.

**Relevant statutory powers:** Local Government Act 1974.

**Background papers:** Held within Leisure Services.

**Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:** The improved Playing Fields would provide numerous opportunities for young people to engage in diversionary activity therefore having positive impact on potential anti-social behaviour.

**Key Decision reference (if required):** N/A.