

SWEYNE PARK EXTENSION – YOUTH FOOTBALL PITCHES

- 1.1 The Proper Officer reports that, pursuant to Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 15 (C) (2), the Chairman of the Review Committee has requested that the following decision made at the meeting of the Executive Board held on 23 April 2008 be called in for scrutiny:-

“That the new football pitches to the rear of Rayleigh Leisure Centre be operated as part of the Council’s grounds maintenance contract.”

- 1.2 To assist Members, a copy of the original report of the Head of Community Services is appended as appendix A.
- 1.3 A report providing further information from the Head of Community Services is appended as appendix B.

R J Honey

Corporate Director (Internal Services)

Background Papers:-

None

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EXECUTIVE BOARD - 23 April 2008

Item 12

**SWEYNE PARK EXTENSION – YOUTH FOOTBALL
PITCHES**

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the development of youth football pitches at the rear of Rayleigh Leisure Centre and seeks a decision on how the pitches are to be booked/managed and which club(s) may be involved.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The development of the pitches has been progressing, with initial Ecological and Arboricultural surveys being completed in Autumn/Winter 2007/08. As a result of these surveys, further information was required regarding reptile habitats, with these surveys being carried out in March/April 2008 (due to dependency on weather conditions and the effect on reptile movement). It is anticipated that the planning application for change of use, including details of additional car parking spaces, will be submitted in May 2008, with ground works to begin in Autumn 2008. It is envisaged that the pitches will be available for use from September 2009.
- 2.2 During this period of surveying, officers have been meeting regularly with local clubs and the Essex County Football Association to discuss how best to make use of the pitches once in place.
- 2.3 Council officers have also met with the Football Foundation to discuss options for funding and what partnership work if any would be required, in order to access such funding.

3 CLUB & COUNTY FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Officers have been undertaking consultations and discussions with both local clubs and the County Football Association for some months. All football clubs in the District were contacted about the plans and offered the opportunity to discuss them further. Six clubs returned the pro-forma detailing their interest, and were invited to a group meeting in October 2007. Of those six, four clubs came to the meeting; the other clubs have not furthered their interest in this project.
- 3.2 The four clubs that remain interested in the project are: Downhall United Youth Football Club, Hambro Colts Youth Football Club, Rayleigh Boys Youth Football Club, Elmwood Colts Football Club.

- 3.3 Discussions with the County Football Association have been focused on the availability of pitches, displacement of teams (can one club be based at the site with the number of pitches offered) and assistance with funding information.

Club Information

Details regarding the four clubs are as follows:-

1. Elmwood Colts Football Club
 - 10 Teams in Club
 - 110-120 members
 - Looking at either booking or leasing options with repair and maintenance responsibility.
 - Cash available as match funding for external grant applications, willing to apply to Lottery & Sport Soccer for funding.
 - Football Association Charter Standard Club
 - Current Match facility: John Fisher and Edwards Hall School
 - Current training facility: Various parks & playing fields including Sweyne Park, Oakwood Park.
 - Interested in use of facility under a lease agreement or just booking individual pitches.

2. Rayleigh Boys Youth Football Club
 - 30 Teams in Club
 - 380 members
 - Cash available as match funding for external grant applications, willing to apply to Football Association and Football Foundation for funding.
 - Football Association Charter Development Club
 - Current Match facility: Fairview, Grove Park, Rayleigh Sports & Social.
 - Current training facility: King Georges Park, Grange, John Fisher, Fairview Park, Grove Park, Love Lane School, Grove Wood School.

- Looking for sole use of facility under a lease agreement with repair and maintenance responsibility.
3. Hambro Colts Youth Football Club
- 18 Teams in Club
 - 250 members
 - Cash available as match funding for external grant applications, willing to apply to Football Foundation for funding.
 - Football Association Charter Standard Club
 - Current training facility: Rawreth Lane
 - Current Match facility: Rocheway Adult Education Centre, Rochford.
 - Disability Sports Activities currently undertaken and further planning/development plans in place.
 - Have submitted action plans as part of the Active Rochford, (Rochford's Community Sports Network), funding application to the Community Initiative Fund. Supplying match funding and leading on disability sports project.
 - Interested in use of facility under a lease agreement or just booking individual pitches.
4. Down Hall United Youth Football Club
- 2 Teams in Club
 - 27 members
 - No cash available to match fund, no response as to possible funding options.
 - Not a Football Association Charter Standard Club
 - Current training facility: Down Hall Primary School
 - Current Match facility: Down Hall Primary School
 - Club are looking to expand year on year.
 - They are only interested in using the pitches on a bookings basis and not having a lease for sole use of the whole area.

4 METHODS OF MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 Two potential methods of management of the pitches have been considered. Firstly, for the new pitches to be booked out in the same way as the District's other pitches, as part of the Grounds Maintenance Contract, or secondly, to be leased with full repair and management responsibility to a football club on a peppercorn rent.
- 4.2 Inclusion within the grounds maintenance contract would create an additional cost to the Council of £7,000 per year to cover ongoing maintenance, lining of the pitches, grass cutting etc. However, the pitches would then be available for booking by any junior clubs in the area on either a week by week or seasonal basis.
- 4.3 Leasing to a club would have no direct financial implication to the Council whilst the club was financially stable. If this were the option that Members chose, then discussions would take place with the club around specific details to be included within the lease e.g. number of games to be played on the pitches, timings of the games, accessing potential external funding streams etc. One option would be to grant the chosen club a lease at a peppercorn rent as it would be expected that they would have to assume full responsibility for maintenance, grass cutting etc. However, Members have already decided to review lease arrangements generally with a view to bringing them in line with one another and so any lease which might be negotiated now would need to contain provisions allowing changes if these become necessary as a result of that review.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 From the range of meetings and information gained from the various local junior clubs, and also the Football Association, the first three clubs mentioned in section 3 of the report, namely Elmwood Colts, Rayleigh Boys and Hambro Colts are all well established clubs, operating a number of teams across a range of age groups, all have some level of Football Association Charter Accreditation, and any of the three clubs would appear to be "appropriate" choices for a lease of the area.
- 5.2 Taking the "leasing to a club" option would remove the maintenance cost from the Council but would limit usage of the five pitches to just one club and this club (dependent on the number of teams it operates) may still need to book pitches at other locations around the District. Whilst including the operation of the pitches within the grounds maintenance contract would incur an additional cost to the Council, accessibility to use of the pitches would potentially be available to all clubs in the area and, therefore, addressing the issue of trying to choose one club when all three clubs mentioned above demonstrate similar credentials in consideration of sole use.

- 5.3 Regarding the possibility of accessing grant funding through the Football Foundation scheme, this could be achieved either through working directly with one particular club or through the option of booking out to a range of clubs.

6 RISK IMPLICATIONS

Operational Risk

- 6.1 Although all the interested football clubs are well established, if the leasing option was selected, and at some stage in the future the chosen club was to fold, the Council would need to pick up the operation and maintenance of these pitches.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 If the booking and operation of the football pitches are to be included within the grounds maintenance contract, there would be an additional cost of £7,000 per annum to the Council. If the pitches were to be leased to a specific club, then it would be expected that the responsibility for the maintenance of the pitches would lie with the club and therefore, no cost to the Council.

8 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 It is proposed that the Board **RESOLVES** to consider the content of this report and to decide whether it wishes to operate the new football pitches to the rear of Rayleigh Leisure Centre:-
- (a) as part of the grounds maintenance contract or;
 - (b) by leasing the pitches to one junior football club and, if option (b) is chosen, which club should be selected for a leasing agreement to be developed.

Jeremy Bourne

Head of Community Services

Background Papers:-

None

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SWEYNE PARK EXTENSION – YOUTH FOOTBALL PITCHES

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a range of information around the process that has been carried out with regard to determining potential usage/management options of the pitches that can be considered as part of their review of the decision taken at Executive Board on 23 April 2008.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Land to the rear of Rayleigh Leisure Centre is currently being developed for use as junior and mini football pitches (3 mini and 2 junior), with the planning application about to be submitted.
- 2.2 Various ecological surveys have been carried out, and pending the final results of these surveys and the success of the planning application, it is intended that the pitches will come into use in September 2009.
- 2.3 A report was presented to the Executive Board on 23 April, whereby a decision was taken to manage the bookings and maintenance of the pitches through its Ground Maintenance Contract, as is the situation with the other football pitches around the District.

3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS RAISED

- 3.1 Once it had been agreed to develop this land for the use of junior football pitches, various options started to be considered for how these pitches could be operated, which included operating them within the Ground Maintenance Contract, and also assessing interest from local clubs in having specific use of the area. Indeed, Rayleigh Boys did contact the Council at around this stage, expressing their interest in having the area as their home base.
- 3.2 In order to assess potential interest levels in the use of the pitches, Officers liaised with the Essex Football Association to obtain a list of all affiliated clubs. From this list, all those junior clubs who played or trained in the District were written to, informing them about the project and asking if they were potentially interested in making use of the facilities. There were in the region of 30 clubs contacted, of which initially six expressed an interest and they were then invited to a meeting at Rayleigh Leisure Centre, where they received further information and also completed a questionnaire around the size of the club, age ranges of teams, current facilities used, funding etc. (Copies of the completed questionnaires for each of the clubs are included as Appendix 1). Following these letters and the subsequent meeting, there were finally four expressions of interest from namely, Rayleigh Boys Youth FC, Hambro Colts FC, Downhall United FC and Elmwood Colts FC. It is presumed that those

clubs that did not respond were satisfied with where they currently play their matches or were not interested in taking “control” of a particular site.

- 3.3 With regards to other pitches within the District, there is one junior pitch at Ashingdon Recreation Ground, two mini and one junior pitch at Grove and one mini pitch at Great Waking. Including adult pitches, there are 33 pitches in total in the District, all of which are booked and maintained by the Council’s Ground Maintenance Contractor, Connaught.
- 3.4 The cost to hire the junior pitches is either £42 on a casual per match booking or £485 for a season’s booking, with the seasonal rate for a mini pitch being £255. The bookings for these pitches tend to be on a Sunday, as this is when all the local leagues take place.
- 3.5 Within the report to Executive Board in April, there was a suggestion that if a lease arrangement was put in place with one particular club, then consideration could be given to charging just a peppercorn rent. As part of determining specific details of any such lease, the level of rent would have to be considered along with other potential responsibilities on the club, within the lease, such as taking on full maintenance costs and therefore the overall affordability of a lease.
- 3.6 The figure of £7,000 that was mentioned in the Executive Board report in April, was purely the cost to the Council for adding the maintenance and operation of these pitches into the Ground Maintenance Contract and was provided by the Contractor. If a club were to take on the maintenance and operation of the pitches themselves, then the costs they would incur would depend on how they undertake this work i.e. contractors, volunteers, parents etc.
- 3.7 Regarding storage of any maintenance equipment that a club may purchase, then dependent on the volume of this equipment, it may be necessary for them to have some sort of shed/storage room on the site. This they would need to put in place themselves.
- 3.7 As previously mentioned, the other football pitches around the District that are sited on Council owned land, are all operated through the Ground Maintenance Contract. There are other pitches within the District, but these are not under the control of the Council eg. Rocheway Adult Community College, Rayleigh Sports & Social Club and various school sites. Members may well be aware of the pitches that are located adjacent to the B1013, Cherry Orchard link road and the fact that these are used exclusively by Ashingdon Youth Football Club. However, this arrangement was made directly between the Football Club and the previous private landowner and had no involvement by the Council.
- 3.8 The planning application that is being put together for the site includes the layout of the pitches and the proposed car parking facilities, but not at this

stage, changing facilities. The extent of changing provision is however being considered, so that the changing facility provided is not excessive to the needs of the usage that will be taking place. Any changing facilities provided would obviously be maintained by the Council, if they retained the operation of the pitches, whereas if the pitches were to be leased by a club, then responsibility for any changing facilities would need to be discussed as part of the detailed lease negotiations.

- 3.9 When gathering information from the clubs' detailed financial accounts were not requested. In terms of finance, the questions that were asked were around what sort of match funding they could potentially offer and whether or not they were able to take on the maintenance responsibility. Those clubs that use District Council pitches will pay the charges mentioned in 3.3 of this report, but where clubs are utilising other privately run pitches, the prices are not known.
- 3.10 With regards to external funding, there are a number of funding pots potentially available to both clubs and the Council, eg. Football Foundation. The eligibility for these grants is not based on their charter status, and indeed, the Council would still be able to apply for funding, whether or not one particular club was leasing the pitches.
- 3.11 If the operation of the pitches were kept "in-house" it would mean that they are potentially available to any of the clubs in the area and would be operated in a manner consistent with the remaining pitches in the District. Additionally, in the early years when the pitches are still becoming fully established, the Council would be able to have direct control over the usage levels, dependent on the condition of the pitches. It could also be the view that as the Council is investing a reasonable sum of money into the creation of these pitches, then at least initially, they should be made available on a general basis to the whole community (even though accepting that a club would take on operational costs).
- 3.12 Where a club is looking for a "permanent home base" then certainly leasing the pitches would be of benefit compared to having to hire on a season by season basis, although potentially the costs would be higher than just the basic season's pitch hire rate.
- 3.13 With regards to a club hiring out the pitches, if they had leased them from the Council, then this would need to be addressed within the specific details of the lease. However, as they are only junior and mini pitches and also that most junior clubs are playing their matches at the same time, then it would probably limit the potential of other clubs using the facilities. If a club did take other bookings, it would need to ensure that the pitches were able to cope with the extra usage and that the additional maintenance requirements could be resourced.

- 3.14 With regard to general public use on non-match times, if a club were based at the location, then again, the access would need to be addressed within the terms of the lease. If operation was to be within the Ground Maintenance Contract, then the areas would be available for “casual kick-arounds” as is currently the situation with the District’s other pitches.

Jeremy Bourne

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Background Papers:-

None

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