

Parks and Leisure Committee

Tuesday, 17th January, 2012

SPECIAL MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Corr (Chairman);
Alderman Rodgers;
Councillors Austin, Cunningham, Haire, Hargey,
Hendron, Kelly (Deputy Chairman), (in the Chair),
Kyle, Mallon, McCabe, McKee, Mac Giolla Mhín,
Mullan, A. Newton, O'Neill, Robinson and Thompson.
- In attendance: Mr. A. Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure;
Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mrs. R. Crozier, Assistant Director of Parks
and Leisure; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Newton and Councillor McNamee.

Scale of Charges for Parks and Leisure 2012/13

(Mrs. J. Wilson, Business Support Manager, attended in connection with this item).

The Committee agreed to defer until a further special meeting consideration of a report on the Scale of Charges for Parks and Leisure Facilities for 2012/13 to afford the Members an opportunity to give due consideration to the revised charges and to the report being amended to include an additional column showing the percentage increase/decrease compared to the previous year.

The Committee agreed further that the Special Meeting be held at 4.30 p.m. on Monday, 23rd January.

Playing Pitches Strategy: Proposed Locations Presentation

(Mr. S. Walker, Departmental Portfolio Programme Manager, attended in connection with this item).

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on the 12th January, it had agreed to defer until its meeting in February consideration of a report on the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment on the Playing Pitches Strategy and Action Plans but to receive at a Special Meeting a presentation on the proposed locations of the synthetic pitches and changing facilities at those sites which had been approved by the Committee for years 1-3 of the Playing Pitches Strategy.

The Departmental Portfolio Programme Manager reminded the Committee that, as part of Phase 1 of the Strategy, it had been agreed that the following five sites be prioritised for development, to include the provision of third generation synthetic pitches:

- Cherryvale Playing Fields
- Cliftonville Playing Fields
- Woodvale Playing Fields
- Falls Park
- Ormeau Park

In addition, changing facilities would either be provided, refurbished or upgraded at five sites, namely:

- Ballysillan Playing Fields
- Musgrave Park Playing Fields
- Westlands, Waterworks Park
- Victoria Park
- Dixon Park

With the assistance of visual aids, he outlined the process to date, which included the formation of a Client Group, the undertaking of a site visit to each of the locations, a site visit to Limavady to view similar facilities, the identification of preferred locations within each site and the establishment of baseline specifications for pitches and changing facilities.

The Departmental Portfolio Programme Manager advised the Committee that each of the new third generation synthetic surface pitches would be Gaelic Athletic Association compliant and also suitable to be played by Association Football. The third generation pitches would measure 130 (or 140) metres long by 80 metres wide, have a 5 metre run off and include a spectator rail approximately 1.5 metres in height. In addition, each of the locations would have 6 metre high security fencing, ball stop netting and floodlighting installed.

With regard to the changing facilities, he explained that each would have 2 team changing rooms which could accommodate up to 20 people in each room, be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act, include integrated showers, be adapted to meet the requirements of female teams, have independent toilets and separate changing areas for match officials. However, the facilities, funded by the Council, would not have meeting rooms, a bespoke medical room nor include lockers as each room would be lockable.

He then reviewed each of the sites in turn and highlighted the preferred location, within each site, of the proposed third generation pitch and/or new/upgraded changing facilities. He concluded by outlining the next steps which would involve firming up the proposals, the appointment of design teams and the completion of economic appraisals. During discussion, the Members made the following points and sought clarification in relation to:

- the current position regarding discussions surrounding partnership working/funding;
- the issue of potential contamination at some of the sites;
- the location of the changing facilities at the Cliftonville and Ballysillan Playing Fields;
- the need to continue to consult with residents living near and the users of the facilities regarding the development and with local schools in relation to access to the facilities;
- the need for the changing facilities to include shutters on the windows and doors as a measure to combat potential vandalism;
- to ensure that the key governing bodies were consulted in relation to the size of the proposed third generation pitches;
- the lack of provision of new pitches earmarked for the East Belfast area, in addition to not enough provision being made in the Strategy for facilities for junior football; and
- given the locations it would not seem possible for the aspiration for the hybrid pitches to be used by the various associations to come to fruition.

In response, the Director of Parks and Leisure explained that discussions around partnership working and funding were well advanced with the Gaelic Athletic Association and he would be reporting to the Committee in due course regarding their potential contribution and the basis on which it would be made.

The site for the changing facility at the Cliftonville Playing Fields had taken account of the plans for the Bunscoil Ben Madigan on the adjacent site which was still under consideration by the Department of Education. The Departmental Portfolio Programme Manager informed the Committee that four locations had been considered for the changing facility at Ballysillan Playing Fields site and he explained the rationale for the selection of the preferred site. However, it would be a matter for the Members to decide on the final location.

The Director of Parks and Leisure referred to the Equality Impact Assessment, which would be considered in February, and its reference to junior pitch provision. He pointed out that the Department was already looking at ways of addressing the balance, with officers investigating various options around junior provision and they would continue to work with a range of partners, including the Football Association, on that issue. It was proposed that the final version of the strategy would include an action point to examine the potential to convert under used full sized pitches into junior sized pitches. In that regard, the Members would have noted that the presentation had highlighted proposals for extra junior provision at two of the sites, that is, Cherryvale Playing Fields and the Ormeau Park.

The Director of Parks and Leisure indicated that he would be confident that there would be multi-use of the hybrid pitches by both Association Football and the Gaelic Athletic Association. He made the point that the sites outlined had already been agreed by the Council as Phase 1 of the Programme which was only part of a ten-year strategy. He explained that the main purpose of the presentation was to ascertain whether the Members were content with the proposed locations for the pitches and the changing facilities within the sites.

The Director of Property and Projects explained that the Committee needed to give direction to officers on which sites and locations should be selected now for development so that the Strategy could be progressed. He pointed out that it would be more beneficial to bundle a number of the projects together and seek tenders at the same time for the development of the pitches and changing facilities. However, the Committee needed to strike a balance between what was wanted, at which location and what could be done within the initial £10m budget as this estimate was for unspecified works. In response to a question from a member, regarding the timescale for the developments, he explained that, for example, in the case of the Cliftonville Playing Fields from the design stage, through planning permission until the pitch was ready for use, it could take between two and two and a half years to complete, therefore, he urged the Committee to begin to prioritise those projects which should be commenced.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed to proceed with the implementation of Phase 1 of the Pitches Strategy with regard to the location of the pitches and changing facilities as outlined in the presentation, subject to discussions being undertaken with the local Elected Representatives regarding the siting of the changing rooms at the Ballysillan Playing Fields.

Contractor's Access at Ballysillan Playing Fields

The Committee was advised that Whitemountain Quarries Limited had approached the Council seeking access for lorries and plant along the path network at the Ballysillan playing fields in order to facilitate re-surfacing work which has been undertaken on part of the Playing Fields which were currently occupied by the Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre. The company wished to traverse some 600 metres of path to the site and to park a lorry on the Council's path to load excavated materials, with resurfacing materials being brought to the site in the same manner. Although vehicle access was available to the Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre, Whitemountain Quarries Limited were of the view that it would be more cost effective for them to utilise the path network through the playing fields. The duration of use of the path network was envisaged to be approximately 10 days.

The Director of Parks and Leisure reported that legal opinion and common practice had indicated that the risks associated with the proposed use of the Playing Fields by the Company should be governed by a formal licence agreement between the Company and the Council which would set out the responsibilities in relation to insurance, indemnities and reinstatement. However, it was understood that Whitemountain Quarries Limited wished to commence work immediately and legal advice had confirmed that the Council might be able to facilitate that through an exchange of letters with signatures, with a Licence Agreement to follow if the works continued beyond the beginning of February, 2012. The relevant letter would require a signature by an authorised signatory of the Company and endeavour to cover the main issues which would normally be referred to in a Licence Agreement.

The Committee granted authority for Council officers to enter into an exchange of letters with Whitemountain Quarries Limited to provide for its proposed access through Ballysillan Playing Fields and associated uses for a period of approximately ten days, with a view to entering into a formal Licence agreement if its use continued for an extended period.

Chairman