

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 30th January, 2023

SPECIAL MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Bunting (Chairperson); and
Councillors Groogan, T. Kelly, Lyons,
McAteer, McKeown, Murray and Spratt.

In attendance: Mr. M. Doherty, Project Manager;
Ms. M. T. McGivern, Project Sponsor Officer; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Gormley.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Linfield FC/Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC BIF Project

The Working Group considered the following report:

1. Introduction

The Working Group will be aware that Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC were awarded £250,000 from the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF) by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 18th November 2016, following a recommendation by the South AWG. Since that time, officers have been working closely with the Group to bring the project forward. At its meeting on 28th November 2022, the Working Group agreed that a report be presented to a special meeting in January addressing in greater detail a request from Belvoir Football Club for the BIF proposal, which includes Phase 1, to be decoupled from the wider masterplan.

2. Recommendations

The Working Group is requested to:

- i. note the project update provided on Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC; and

- ii. agree to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the BIF proposal which includes Phase 1 is decoupled from the wider masterplan and note that any future phases will be taken forward separately by Linfield FC and Boys Brigade.

3. Background

Overview

The Working Group will recall that the Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC (BIF33) project was one of the projects that the Council had agreed, in principle, to provide funding up to a maximum of £250,000 as part of the Belfast Investment Fund. The proposed project was highlighted by Linfield FC, Belfast Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC. These groups came together around developing a site at Belvoir Park into a new state of the art training complex to foster the development of football and other sporting activities within the Boys Brigade, as well as to enhance skills and performance pathways for Linfield Youth Academy Players and Belvoir FC.

The Community Sports Hub Project was added as a *Stage 1 – Emerging* Project under BIF in November 2016. Specifically, the South AWG agreed to ring fence £250,000 (from its additional outer South BIF allocation) towards the first phase of the community hub project i.e. the cost of upgrading Belvoir FC’s pitch to be met in full and the remaining allocated towards the construction of the 3G pitch.

In May 2017, as per the recommendation from the South Belfast AWG, the S P and R Committee agreed to a re-scoped first Phase of the project to be delivered with £250,000 ring-fenced BIF – i.e. replacement of Belvoir FC’s grass football pitch (currently leased from NIHE) with excess funds to go towards the widening of the access lane and resurfacing of the existing car park. The purpose of this scope change was to allow optimise its opportunity for delivery by creating a stand-alone phase that did not require the requirement of securing match funding to proceed with the first phase.

Project Description

The overall Community Sports Complex scheme is aimed at delivering mutual benefit to the local community, the Boy’s Brigade, Belvoir FC and Linfield FC and is spread over 5 phases. The masterplan that includes the BIF project received Planning approval in 2020 for the upgrading of playing fields to include 2 new 3G pitch surfaces and 1 grass pitch, floodlights, fencing, dug outs, 1No. 200-seater stand, toilet

blocks, turnstiles, additional car parking and associated ground works. Details are provided in the attached appendix.

The Masterplan includes the following Phases;

- Phase 1 - Priority A (BIF Project proposal) – replacement of Belvoir FC’s grass football pitch, incl. car parking resurfacing and widening access lane;
- Phase 1 – Priority B - Full size floodlit grass pitch and full size flood lit 3G pitch (with dugouts, goals and 200 seater spectator stand); and
- Phases 2 – 5: A small 9 aside 3G pitch; a full size, flood lit, academy grass pitch; a cross fit area and 8 lane sprint track; and a full size Indoor 3G Soccer arena.

The BIF project relates to Phase 1 only. All subsequent phases are intended to be delivered by Linfield FC and Boys Brigade.

Phase 1 – BIF Proposal:

The main beneficiary of the first phase (BIF project proposal) is Belvoir FC. The business plan sets out the project’s delivery priorities to be ‘Phase 1 - Priority A (BIF Project proposal) – replacement of Belvoir FC’s grass football pitch, including car parking resurfacing and widening access lane’. Although Belvoir FC will have primacy of use during football season the pitch will be available for wider community use as part of the Belvoir Community Sports Complex. The improved car parking and laneway will meet the needs of wider users of the site.

The quantifiable objectives of the BIF project are:

- the upgrade of a poor quality grass pitch and establishment as home ground for Belvoir FC;
- increased use of pitch at this location in response to improved condition (drainage etc) and accessibility;
- improved perception of the area in response to physical regeneration; and
- the establishment of new ownership and management arrangements for the pitch that protect Belvoir FC’s long-term use of the facility.

The project will:

- provide a high quality grass pitch for Belvoir FC to use as a permanent, dedicated home football ground providing much needed services to its members and residents across the Belvoir estate and wider community;
- provide parking provision for users of new grass pitch as well as existing and proposed new facilities on wider sporting hub site; and
- create healthier and more active people and local communities through the improved sporting provision in the Belvoir area.

3. Key Issues

The BIF project proposal focuses on the first phase of the overall sporting hub alone (i.e. replacement pitch for Belvoir FC). £250,000 BIF funding is ring fenced for delivery of phase 1 subject to Due Diligence. Completion of Due Diligence requires clarification of land ownership and confirmation that all necessary approvals are in place and this information remains outstanding.

Belvoir FC's existing pitch is owned by NIHE and an area for car-parking and road widening is owned by Boys Brigade. NIHE had an arrangement in place whereby they leased the lands on a rolling one-year lease to Belvoir Football Club. As part of the Due Diligence stage, the Council has advised NIHE that:

- a condition of funding would be the organisation (incl. Belvoir FC) having security of tenure for the land being redeveloped, and that in this instance a 25-year lease is required; and
- a lease should be drawn in wide enough terms to allow Belvoir FC to share the use of the new pitch with Linfield FC and the Boys Brigade.

In order to be able to pass through the Due Diligence process, the Council requires a lease granted to Belvoir Community Sports Complex or the Boys Brigade. The Boys Brigade had agreed with NIHE that they would purchase the lands, then they would lease the lands to Belvoir Community Sports Complex who would in turn then lease the lands to Belvoir Football Club. However, as this has taken considerable time to happen with a number of issues regarding the different parties with the transfer of land, the option for NIHE to transfer lands to the Council and for Belvoir FC to take forward the project is currently being explored as the

preferable option. NIHE is receptive to transferring the land directly to Belfast City Council who would then provide a lease to Belvoir FC. The BIF project can be taken forward in advance of the remainder of the wider masterplan.

The Working Group is asked to agree to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the BIF proposal which, includes Phase 1, is decoupled from the wider masterplan, and note that any future phases will be taken forward separately by Linfield FC and Boys Brigade.

The Working Group adopted the recommendations.

Request to Present - Queen's University

The Working Group agreed to receive at a future meeting a presentation from representatives of Queen's University's School of Natural and Built Environment's StreetSpace project on an innovative spatial plan for Botanic Avenue, Donegall Pass and the Holyland area.

Chairperson