



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Playing Pitches Strategy
Date:	14 April 2011
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Claire Sullivan, Policy and Business Development Officer

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>Members are aware of the ongoing process to develop a playing pitches strategy and as part of this a number of reports have been considered by committee. The latest of these was the special meeting of the committee on 21 March 2011. An extract from the minutes is set out below:</p> <p><i>“Arising from discussion, Members expressed the following concerns:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>• the Cliftonville playing fields and other facilities located in the North of the City had not been included within the list of viable sites for the delivery of phase 1; and</i><i>• that it appeared that adequate provision had not be made for the future development of cricket and junior and ladies football provision. In addition, several Members sought further information in relation to the matrix which had been utilised to score each viable site for development.</i> <p><i>After discussion, the Committee:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>(i) noted that action plans would be developed for the delivery of objectives 1 and 2 contained within the report;</i><i>(ii) agreed that the weightings associated with the prioritisation matrix be amended as follows:</i><ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>- Need 30%</i><i>- Proximity 10%</i><i>- External Funding 20%</i><i>- Partnership 10%</i><i>- Intensification of use 20%</i><i>- Reputational Risk 10%; and</i><i>(iii) agreed to defer consideration of the prioritised lists for pitches and training facilities to enable further information to be obtained.”</i> <p>Since the special committee officers have been working to address these concerns and the information requested is detailed in the following sections.</p>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p><u>Juvenile provision</u></p> <p>Members queried the provision that is currently being made for juveniles, in particular junior soccer, and whether it was meeting the need across the city.</p> <p>An analysis of current usage shows that 6 youth soccer leagues are allocated a total of 66 pitches across the city on Saturday mornings for their matches. A total of 5 pitches are used on Sundays for junior soccer. The teams that make up the junior soccer leagues range in age from under 10s up to under 18s. Five GAA clubs book pitches at Cherryvale, Boucher and Cliftonville for juvenile matches and one rugby club use a pitch at Cherryvale for its junior team. These pitches are not allocated and are booked on a first come basis.</p> <p>Currently juvenile games for all sports are played on the full size pitches and the leagues/clubs mark out smaller areas with cones if this is required. The leagues have not requested that the council mark out pitches for junior games. The council currently provide smaller portable posts at Cherryvale; and a request has also been made for smaller portable posts at Boucher Road and this is currently being considered.</p> <p>Consideration could be given to converting several full size pitches into junior soccer pitches; there are several pitches that are not currently used by senior leagues (one at Boucher Road and one at Strangford Avenue) or only on an occasional basis (four at Victoria Park). If this option was considered the impact on older teams would need to be considered further. There would also be a financial impact if this option was chosen as it is unlikely that senior leagues would chose to play on junior pitches resulting in a lose of income.</p> <p>It is recommended that further work be carried out in relation to this issue including an examination of best practice from elsewhere.</p>
2.2	<p><u>Cliftonville Playing Fields</u></p> <p>At the special meeting on the 21 March 2011 Members expressed concerns that the Cliftonville Playing Fields and other facilities located in the north of the city had not been included within the list of viable sites for delivery in phase 1 of the strategy.</p> <p>Members will be aware that the Council's agreed position regarding the development of Bunscoil Bhean Mhadagain at the Cliftonville Playing Fields was decided by the Community and Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries Sub-Committee) on 6 February 2007. The Sub-Committee agreed to proceed with the sale of the land to the Bunscoil, a site of some 1.3 acres and agreed to proceed with a grant of rights to the Bunscoil in respect of just over half an acre to facilitate the development of shared car-parking. The</p>

funding for the sale of the site was to be provided by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland. The Sub-Committee also agreed to the development of a new GAA pitch on the remaining land behind the school which would be part-funded by the sale of the site.

The Department of Education informed the Bunscoil in 2010 that the economic appraisal had been approved and that the preferred option is for a replacement school on the basis outlined above. However the Department have not to date given an indication as to when it would be in a position to fund the school development.

Following the discussion at the special meeting on 21 March 2011, the Director contacted the Deputy Secretary in the Department of Education and has subsequently written to the Department to seek clarification of the current position. To date no response has been received from the Department.

The Director has also met with representatives of the Bunscoil and the two GAA clubs that currently use the playing fields to explore the options regarding the site. They have undertaken to write to the Council outlining their joint position.

Officers have also identified a range of possible scenarios regarding pitch development on the site and have been assessing them against the prioritisation matrix. Until clarification is received from the Department of Education, the Bunscoil and the GAA clubs it is not possible to provide Members with sufficient information to review the position regarding the Cliftonville Playing Fields.

2.3 Partnership Opportunities

Members will be aware that in the second phase of the implementation of the strategy the council wishes to work in partnership with other organisations in the provision of playing pitches. The council is currently exploring the possibility of developing Memoranda of Understandings with both BELB and CCMC which would include a requirement for consultation between all partners on any capital expenditure on new facilities including playing pitches or leisure facilities. Work will continue on this in conjunction with the Director of Property and Projects and a report will be brought forward in due course.

2.4 Prioritisation – pitches

At the special committee meeting in March 2011, Members requested the detail behind the scores that each site was given following the application of the prioritisation matrix; this has now being circulated to all Members of the Parks and Leisure Committee.

It was proposed that any capital development of pitches would follow the priority list, in priority order (and would involve not less than 5 sites) subject to consideration of “deliverability” issues or obstacles which could potentially hinder development of the site.

The sites which are chosen for a new or upgraded 3G pitch development will also have provision made for the necessary ancillary features such as sufficient changing facilities, flood lighting and fencing.

Members should note that the GAA have confirmed that they allow 3G pitches to be used for both training and competitive matches.

Members are also advised that the council has been holding ongoing discussions with the GAA re potential partnerships, including funding for the development of pitches and the GAA have provided the council with outline proposals for developments at Woodlands and Cherryvale Playing Fields. These will have to be assessed in some detail. If as a result of partnership funding additional money becomes available from the £10 million allocation in the capital programme, it is the intention that this money would be used to develop sites additional to the five that have been initially prioritised.

2.5 Cricket pitches

The draft strategy provides for the installation of cricket squares at two sites. Subject to Committee agreement it is proposed that an additional cricket square would be installed at the City of Belfast Playing Fields and that the current cricket square at Blanchflower be upgraded. This would bring the total number of cricket squares that the council provide up to five; three at City of Belfast Playing Fields and one each at Blanchflower and Grove Playing Fields (two of which are synthetic wickets).

2.6 Changing Facilities

An upgrade of existing changing facilities is also planned in the first phase of implementation of the playing pitches strategy. The upgrade will involve 4 sites (at an estimate of approx £300K each) and it is proposed that the sites will be chosen from the following:

- Ballysillan – new facility
- Blanchflower – upgrade to existing facilities
- Dixon - upgrade to existing facilities
- Musgrave Park – new facility
- Victoria – upgrade to existing facilities
- Waterworks (Westlands) – new facility
- Wedderburn – upgrade to existing facilities

The criteria outlined in the prioritisation matrix are not appropriate when applied to the investment decisions required for changing facilities. Instead this list is based on information regarding condition at existing changing facilities given the intention to provide adequate changing at any new pitch site.

Members should note that this list is subject to the final decision that is taken on which sites will be chosen for pitch development and therefore may change.

2.7	<p><u>Next Steps</u></p> <p>Subject to committee and Council approval of the capital investment proposals the next stage in the process is the second phase of public consultation. This will focus on the local impact of the development of sites as agreed by council.</p> <p>Members agreed at the special meeting in December 2010 that the public consultation exercise will involve a series of meetings with key stakeholders and users and that these will be independently facilitated. The consultation papers will also be available to download from the website and information on the second phase of the consultation will be sent out to all those people on our mailing list.</p>
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3	<p>Resource Implications</p> <p><u>Financial</u> £10 million has been allocated in the capital programme for the implementation of the playing pitches strategy in the period 2011-2014</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u> No additional human resources known at this time.</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u> None at this stage although the implementation of the strategy may have implications on the number and type of playing pitches provided by the council.</p>
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4	<p>Equality and Good Relations Implications</p> <p>Policy Arc Ltd has been appointed to externally verify the equality dimensions to the development of the strategy. Their feedback is that the process to date is in line with the statutory guidance. They continue to offer advice and feedback to the council throughout the consultation and EQIA process.</p>
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5	<p>Recommendations</p> <p>Not all of the information and clarification requested by Members at the Special Meeting on 21 March 2011 is yet available. Members are asked to note the progress to date and agree that final recommendations will be reported to the Committee at its June meeting.</p>
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6	<p>Decision Tracking</p> <p>A report outlining a final recommendation will be brought to committee in June 2011 by the Director of Parks and Leisure.</p>
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7	Key to Abbreviations
	GAA: Gaelic Athletic Association BELB: Belfast Education and Library Board CCMS: Council for Catholic Maintained Schools EQIA: Equality Impact Assessment
8.	Documents attached
	None.