



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Suffolk Playing Fields
Date:	14 April 2011
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Stephen Walker, Principal Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
	<p>The committee will recall that at its meeting on 10 March 2011 it agreed to change the recommendation of the report regarding Suffolk playing fields and to accede to the request from the Suffolk football club to refurbish one of the disused pitches at the facility. In order to provide the necessary direction to officers this report sets out the background to the request together with the policy and legislative context for the decision.</p> <p>Members are reminded that Suffolk playing fields are currently managed in part by Suffolk football club under a facilities management agreement. There are 5 pitches on the site, 2 of which are unused and require refurbishment and drainage. There are no plans at this time to undertake this work.</p> <p>Members are aware of ongoing discussions regarding the draft pitches strategy.</p> <p>Council officers have, at the request of the football club, met with its representatives to discuss its development proposals. The football club plays an important role within the small community housed within the Suffolk estate and wishes to further support and contribute to that community through making the best use of its resources and the surrounding facilities. The club itself has aspirations for its own future development and its ambition to play at a higher level.</p> <p>To support these aims the club has prepared a preliminary development proposal which contains two phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Phase 1 relates to the refurbishment of one of the two unused pitches to bring it into use; the cost of this would be met through a grant for

	<p>£30,700 from the Alpha programme which is administered through Groundwork NI. In addition, the club would, at its own expense, erect perimeter and spectator fencing and undertake additional work regarding access. It should be noted that the pitch would not be available for use until the start of the 2012/2013 season. Members are asked that the club would request preferential use of this pitch, in line with the facilities management agreement, when it becomes playable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 2 of the proposal relates to the construction of additional changing facilities, this would be on land adjacent to the pitch, and would be in addition to the existing changing facilities; it is our understanding that the new facility would primarily be for the use of the club and its opponent teams, although at this time there is little detail available. The provision of this facility would require significant external funding; it is likely to require security of tenure as part of the terms and conditions of the funding and it would require the necessary statutory approvals, planning, building control etc. The exact implications for the council, if any, are not known. <p>The current position is that the club has received conditional approval from Groundwork NI in respect of their application for funding to refurbish the pitch as outlined as part of Phase 1. Unlike other funding bodies there is no specific requirement from Entrust as regards security of tenure. Groundwork NI has informed us that 5 years is normally a sufficient period. The club has asked for a 7 year agreement, however, in order to be consistent with other agreements and previous legal advice it is proposed that the 5 year period be applied.</p> <p>In relation to Phase 2, proposals are at a concept stage and there has been no significant progress towards obtaining the necessary approvals or seeking of funding. The Committee is therefore asked to note that at some point the Club may return with a further request for land to facilitate the construction of additional changing facilities.</p>
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2.	Key Issues
	<p>There are a number of issues emerging from this proposals which the committee should take into account when considering its view on this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ongoing discussions regarding the draft pitches strategy; it is important that the strategy provide a framework within decisions regarding playing field provision should be considered. Officers from Property and Projects are currently working up a disposal policy which will be agreed through Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. One of the key issues is the need to be consistent and transparent in matters relating to disposal. This may include the need to seek expressions of interest to ensure that other interested parties have been given an opportunity to benefit from any council decision to dispose of land in support of its wider objectives. However, on the basis that there is an existing facilities management agreement in place; that the club has already secured funding; and that this is not a disposal; we can proceed with the request. Any agreement in relation

	<p>to this request will require the retention of an element of public use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee is reminded that where a lease is considered be the most appropriate form of agreement a premium/rent is normally paid, as is the case with other such leases or terms of disposal. • The committee will be aware that the leasing of any land within larger council facilities might constrain future development options. • The current proposal from Suffolk FC will increase the net provision of playing fields by 1 pitch through bringing an used pitched, in need of refurbishment, back into use again. • The works will be carried out at no financial cost to the council. • The club clearly has aspirations to play at a higher level, therefore the club will be ultimately aiming to establish a standalone facility within the wider playing field provision.
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3.	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial Implications</u> The proposals will be totally funded through external funding with any short fall matched by Suffolk football club.</p> <p><u>Human Resource Implications</u> There are no additional human resource implications</p> <p><u>Asset and other implications</u> The proposal will increase the availability of pitches for general booking.</p>

4.	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	None.

5.	Recommendations
	<p>It is recommended that the committee agree:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to enter into an appropriate management arrangement with Suffolk football club for a period of 5 years in respect of the use of the agreed pitch on condition that the refurbishment works are satisfactorily completed and that the necessary statutory approvals have been obtained; 2. that the council will not contribute to any short fall in capital funding; 3. that the club will, at its own expense, undertake the management and maintenance of the pitch and its ancillary fencing etc; 4. that the decision to enter into an agreement regarding the use of the pitch does not commit the council to any similar agreement in respect of any future request for additional land;

6.	Decision Tracking
	A further report will be brought to the committee in August 2011 by the Principal Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager to provide an update on progress.

	Key to Abbreviations
	None.

	Documents Attached
	None.