



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Playing Pitches Strategy
Date:	9 June 2011
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
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1.	Relevant Background Information
	<p>The committee has been engaged in an ongoing process to develop a playing pitches strategy and as part of this a number of reports have been considered by committee. The most recent consideration was at the meeting of the committee on 14 April 2011. At this meeting Members noted the progress to date and agreed that final recommendations would be reported to the committee at its June meeting.</p> <p>The aim of the draft playing pitches strategy is: <i>To contribute to improved health and wellbeing in Belfast by enabling adequate outdoor sports facilities and, working with partners, seek to maximise the provision and use of safe, accessible and quality outdoor leisure facilities.</i></p> <p>The draft strategy has three high level objectives which are supported by a number of sub-objectives. These are:</p> <p><u>Objective 1 – Capital investment</u> To deliver and, working in partnership, enable a programme of capital development, enhancement and maintenance investments which address identified deficiencies and protect existing playing pitch provision.</p> <p><u>Objective 2 – Management</u> To implement and monitor a range of management options with community and statutory partners, so as to maximise people’s participation in team sports activity.</p> <p><u>Objective 3 – Sports development</u> Working in partnership to develop and deliver a sports development programme to maximise people’s participation in team sports activity. This will include under-represented groups, such as females and those with disabilities.</p>

	<p>The first phase of the public consultation commenced on 10 January and closed on 4 March 2011 and the findings of this were presented to Members at a special committee on 21 March 2011.</p> <p>As a result of the meetings to date the following has been agreed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the strategy would cover a 10 year period; • the strategy would promote partnership working; • capital investment in the first three years of the strategy would primarily be in council owned sites; • delivery in years 1-3 would be a combination approach of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – new pitches and pitch upgrades including ancillary provisions; – investment in changing provision; – cricket square installation/upgrade; – small scale investment in educational facilities to secure an increased community access to educational sites. • a revised prioritisation matrix for investment decisions regarding potential sites. <p>At the special meeting of the committee on 21 March 2011 Members expressed concerns that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Cliftonville playing fields had not been included in the list of viable sites for phase 1 investment; and • it appeared that insufficient consideration had been given to the development of cricket and junior and ladies football provision. <p>An update on the work that had commenced to address these concerns, particularly with regard to Cliftonville playing fields and junior football provision was provided to the committee at the April meeting. It was agreed that final recommendations be made to the June meeting of the committee.</p>
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2	<p>Key Issues</p> <p><u>Prioritisation – pitches</u></p> <p>Thirty one council owned sites were considered for potential investment for new pitch provision. These were assessed using the revised prioritisation matrix also taking into account deliverability issues. This created the following short list of sites for 3G hybrid pitch provision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodlands • Cherryvale • Falls Park • Ormeau Park • Boucher Road playing fields • North Link playing fields <p>The last four sites on this list achieved the same score in the prioritisation matrix but are listed in rank order for deliverability. The GAA has proposed a partnership approach to the development of the Woodlands and Cherryvale sites which enhanced their scoring. If selected for development</p>
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detailed negotiations will be held with GAA to firm up these proposals.

Cliftonville playing fields was not on the original prioritisation list because the previous arrangement agreed by the council with the Bunscoil Bhean Mhadagain school which tied pitch development to the sale of the site for the school development introduced issues around deliverability in phase 1 of the pitch investment programme. Since this was first raised by the committee in March a number of meetings have been held with the interested parties.

The current confirmed position is:

- The Department of Education is unable to confirm a date for the school development.
- In light of this both the school and the GAA clubs are content to revise their agreement to enable the pitch and school to proceed as separate developments.
- The GAA has proposed entering into a partnership agreement for the development of a 3G pitch at this facility given the lack of GAA provision in North Belfast. As with Woodlands and Cherryvale this would require detailed negotiations with GAA.
- The site will only accommodate one full size GAA pitch to allow room for the future school development.
- Given the above and using the prioritisation matrix the Cliftonville playing fields site would be the third highest scoring site after Woodlands and Cherryvale.

Therefore it is proposed that the following five sites are selected for development in phase 1:

- Woodlands
- Cherryvale
- Cliftonville playing fields
- Falls Park
- Ormeau Park

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 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 provides 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).

Changing Facilities

Investment in changing facilities is also planned for phase 1 implementation. It was originally anticipated that four sites be selected (at an estimate of approx £300k each) however given the anticipated partnership funding and the lower costs likely to be associated with the Cliftonville development it is now proposed that this be increased to five sites.

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 conditions at existing changing facilities given the intention to provide adequate changing at any new pitch site.

The following sites are proposed for changing facility investment in phase 1:

- Ballysillan – new facility
- Waterworks (Westland) – new facility
- Musgrave Park – new facility
- Dixon Park – upgrade
- Victoria - upgrade

Juvenile provision

Members will be aware that queries have been raised around the provision that is currently being made for juveniles, in particular junior soccer, and whether it was meeting the need across the city.

Officers have undertaken an exercise to determine the practice in other local authorities and of the five contacted only two had any dedicated junior association football pitches but they did not assess that they provided enough to meet all the demand in the area. All the councils contacted used cones and portable nets on full size pitches for junior games across all the sporting codes.

One of the councils contacted has an arrangement with a local primary school to use their pitch on Saturday mornings (free of charge) to run 7 and 9 a side leagues and are also planning on building five-a-side astro turf cages which could also be used for junior games.

There is recognition that the demand for junior association football is growing and that there is a move towards 7 and 9 a side games for underage players. A paper produced by the Football Association (FA) 'Small Sided Football, Good Practice Guide 2010/11' states that: 'Small sided football also has a growing role in supporting the introduction to football within school environments. Facility and playing field restrictions mean... that small sided football can be a useful ally to support a teacher's football delivery...'

An analysis of current usage shows that 6 youth association football leagues that have a total of 394 teams and 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 football. The teams that make up the junior football leagues range in age from under 10s up to under 18s.

The council currently provides some dedicated junior pitches and will continue to examine the potential to convert underused full size pitches into junior size pitches. It is also proposed that officers meet with the IFA to discuss the provision of junior facilities and to develop a programme of joint

working to plan for junior provision in line with best practice. Officers will also hold discussions with other providers of junior facilities including schools and organisations such as the Boys Brigade.

Action Plans

Action plans have now been developed for each of the three objectives within the strategy and are attached as Appendix 1.

A key aim under objective 1 in the strategy is to work with education partners (schools, higher and further education) to deliver increased access to their outdoor leisure facilities. Initial discussions have been held with education providers which indicated a willingness to engage with the council to mutual benefit. This work will be taken forward in conjunction with the Director of Property and Projects. However within the combination approach to investment in pitch facilities it was agreed to invest up to £750,000 in education facilities mainly to provide floodlighting to secure greater community access to educational pitch provision. It is therefore proposed that officers, together with the Finance and Resources Department, develop a process to invite applications from educational facilities for this purpose.

Review of Facility Management Agreements (FMAs)

With regard to the future of FMAs, the department has commenced a review of the FMAs that currently exist for pitches and as part of this a full root and branch review will be undertaken, which will involve consultation with clubs and Members and the development of a revised policy and procedure around pitch bookings. A report outlining the detail of the review and the associated findings will be brought to the Committee in the autumn.

Next Steps

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. The consultation will be for a 12 week period and it is proposed that this take place from Monday 25th July to Friday 14th October (pending agreement on pitches sites).

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 and to ensure maximum participation these will be held in September. 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.

Following the second phase of the public consultation a report outlining the key findings from it will be brought back to Members for consideration and discussion. The revised draft strategy will also be brought to the Members for approval.

	<p>A timeline outlining the process is attached as Appendix 2.</p> <p>In the interim work with the Director of Property and Projects will commence to design and cost in detail the proposals. Negotiations with GAA will also be undertaken to firm up the partnership proposals.</p>
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3	Resource Implications
	<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>

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	<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>

5	Recommendations
	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <p>(i) agree that the following five sites are prioritised for development in phase 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cherryvale playing fields • Woodlands playing fields • Cliftonville playing fields • Falls Park • Ormeau Park <p>(ii) agree that the following five changing facilities are upgraded in phase 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballysillan – new facility • Waterworks (Westland) – new facility • Musgrave Park – new facility • Dixon Park – upgrade • Victoria - upgrade <p>(iii) agree that officers meet with the IFA to discuss a programme of joint working around junior association football based around best practice;</p>

	(iv) agree to develop a process to invite applications for enhancement to educational facilities to secure greater community access; and (iv) note the action plans.
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6	Decision Tracking
	A report detailing the findings of the second phase of the consultation and the final revised strategy will be brought to committee in November 2011 by the Director of Parks and Leisure.

7	Key to Abbreviations
	GAA: Gaelic Athletic Association IFA: Irish Football Association DENI: Department of Education Northern Ireland EQIA: Equality Impact Assessment

8.	Documents attached
	Appendix 1: Action Plans Appendix 2: Timeline