



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Upgrade of Pitches to Intermediate League Level
Date:	9 August 2012
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Katrina Morgan, Leisure Operations Manager

1	Relevant Background Information
	<p>Members are aware of the recently developed playing pitches strategy and that as part of this a number of decisions have been made by Committee and that £10 million has been allocated in the capital programme for the implementation of the playing pitches strategy in the period 2011-2014.</p> <p>In addition to these requirements a number of football clubs have made council aware of their requirement to play at intermediate league level and the existing lack of facilities. Discussions have been held with IFA regarding the current position of Belfast clubs and the Intermediate League. Therefore consideration is being given to upgrading three additional pitches so that they meet the IFA's intermediate League ground criteria.</p> <p>The first pitch is the third generation (3G) FIFA-endorsed rubber crumb pitch, at Olympia and the durability of the surface means that matches can be played concurrently one after the other and could provide a solution to all those matches that are postponed during wet weather. Numerous clubs and organisations avail of the 3G facilities at Olympia but none of these are Irish Football Association (IFA) Intermediate League teams as the facilities currently do not satisfy all of the IFA Intermediate League criteria.</p> <p>The second location is Clarendon Playing fields and the third location is Dixon Playing fields.</p> <p>It is proposed that the specification for Clarendon and Dixon Playing Fields is worked up and ready for implementation should funding becoming available.</p> <p>Currently no provision has been made for these upgrades in departmental</p>

	budgets.
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2	<p>Key Issues</p> <p>An inspection of all three locations was carried out recently by the IFA and highlighted several non compliances relating to the Intermediate League ground criteria.</p> <p><u>Olympia</u> The 3G pitch/facility meets the majority of the IFA’s criteria but a barrier with a minimum height of 1.0m is required to safeguard the access from changing facility to the playing area of players and officials.</p> <p><u>Clarendon and Dixon Playing Fields</u> Several actions will be required to be undertaken at both locations including the erection of perimeter fencing and a barrier with a minimum height of 1.0m to safeguard the access from changing facility to the playing area of players and officials.</p> <p>Work will have to be carried out at all three sites to ensure that the grounds meet the ‘access to pitch for players and officials’ and other criteria. Officers have liaised with building control, health and safety and the Council’s approved fencing supplier and have developed a suitable proposal to meet all of the IFA’s criteria for the three sites.</p> <p>Clubs must provide written confirmation from the Council that they have sole control of the ground and its environs on match days, and that only a referees inspection can be used to declare the pitch unplayable. Clubs, where appropriate will be required to block book facilities. It is envisaged that the expression of interest process will be conducted annually.</p> <p>The Olympia pitch has the potential to accommodate more than one club and should this project be taken forward it would be the intention to invite expressions of interest for the block booking of the pitch for use in the intermediate year. It is envisaged that the expression of interest process will be conducted annually.</p> <p>Both Clarendon and Dixon Playing Fields are currently managed under a facility management agreement (FMA). Members will be aware that FMAs are currently under review and will be considered by Committee in September. It is likely that this will lead to a change to the current approach but is unlikely to have any immediate impact on clubs using these facilities.</p> <p>To maximise any future investment in Clarendon and Dixon Playing Fields it would be necessary to have more than one club make use of the intermediate league facilities. It is therefore proposed to initiate discussions with the clubs involved regarding potential around sharing arrangements. Any such arrangement would also have to be subject to an expressions of interest process</p>
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3	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial</u> The estimated value of services for the upgrade work at each site is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olympia –£8,000 (this can be accommodated in the 2012/13 maintenance budget) • Clarendon Playing Fields –£35k to £40k • Dixon Playing Fields –£35k to £40k <p>There is currently no provision in existing budgets for the works at Clarendon and Dixon Playing Fields.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u> There are no additional human resource implications</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u> The proposal would increase the number of weekday bookings on the 3G pitch at Olympia as the successful club will require at least one additional training session per week.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
	The processes proposed in this report will be subject to the Council's existing equality screening process;

5	Recommendations
	<p>It is recommended that Committee give approval for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed works at Olympia Leisure Centre being completed in the current financial year. • Subject to IFA approval, an expression of interest process be initiated for the block booking of the pitch at Olympia for the current season. • The works at Clarendon and Dixon be prioritised should funding become available subject to discussions being undertaken with the FMA holders regarding ground sharing arrangements. • A further report be presented to Committee in due course on progress with this initiative.

6	Decision Tracking
	None

7	Key to Abbreviations
	3G pitch – Third generation pitch IFA – Irish Football Association

8	Documents Attached
	None.