

Extract from minutes of –

PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

5th December, 2013

“Cherryvale Playing Fields – 3G Pitch

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 2nd December, had referred back the minute of the meeting of 5th November, under the heading ‘Cherryvale Playing Fields’, to enable further consideration to be given to options which had been formulated by local residents. Accordingly, the Committee reconsidered the undernoted extract of the minute of the special meeting of 5th November, together with an additional report, as set out, which had been tabled for the Committee’s consideration:

“Cherryvale Playing Fields

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 10th October, it had agreed to defer consideration of a report in respect of the establishment of a 3G pitch within the Cherryvale Playing Fields. That decision had been taken to enable the Committee to undertake a study visit to the facility on Saturday, 19th October, and to receive deputations at and a further special meeting on Tuesday, 5th November.

Accordingly, the Committee considered the undernoted report in this regard:

“1 Relevant Background Information

The Committee is reminded that at its meeting in October 2013 it received a report regarding proposals on pitch development at Cherryvale Playing Fields. Following representation from some residents and users of the playing fields expressing their objections and concerns to the proposal the Committee agreed to defer the report to allow for a site visit to the playing fields and to receive representation from groups affected by the proposals. The groups invited include:

- 1. Sports clubs who use the facilities;**
- 2. Residents from Knock Eden who live immediately adjacent to the playing fields;**
- 3. Other users of the playing fields who are not affiliated to any of the sporting codes; and**
- 4. Those who are opposed to the installation of artificial turf pitch on the playing fields;**

Option 2 of that report (Proposed Agreed Option from Sporting Codes) reflects the optimal sporting solution given the land and financial parameters. It enables a full size artificial turf floodlit pitch to be provided on the site which will enable all three sporting codes use of the facility.

There is opposition amongst some residents and users to the construction of an artificial floodlit pitch in the playing fields. However, there is also a lobby which is in support of the investment on the site but opposed to its location as outlined in option 2.

Additional Option to locate artificial pitch on Pitch 1

Following the most recent engagement some residents' representatives have proposed as an alternative that an artificial turf pitch be located on Pitch No 1 which is immediately adjacent to the Ravenhill Road and which is currently a full size grassed turf GAA pitch.

Members are asked to note that whilst this may alleviate the concerns of some of the residents from Knock Eden, it may generate opposition from those living immediately facing the location, however, there has been no discussion with those residents about the proposal. From a technical point of view, a full size synthetic pitch to meet the needs of GAA cannot be provided on Pitch 1 without removing the line of trees which are a feature of the park.

An undersized synthetic pitch could be fitted on this site but there is no real argument for development of a sub standard sports solution.

The provision of a synthetic pitch at Pitch 1 would also require the replacement of the grass GAA pitch on the site which is estimated to cost in the region of £300,000 for which there is no budget established within the financial limit set by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. This option creates issues with fitting two full sized grass GAA pitches into the space available. In addition Option 5 would remove a full size GAA pitch from the site at a time when under provision of GAA pitches in the city has been identified.

Amendment to Option 2

In an attempt to alleviate a number of the issues raised by residents, option 2 has been amended, the amendment includes positioning the pitches as far away from the houses in Knock Eden as possible. In reality, this will mean approximately 30m from the fence line at the rear of the properties. In addition, we will prepare a landscape plan which will include the planting of

additional trees to buffer the light and noise from the playing of sporting games. Other options such as timing of floodlights can also be examined.

2 Key Issues

The Committee is asked to consider the following:

- 1. As part of the prioritisation of sites under the Pitches Strategy the Council has agreed that an artificial turf pitch will be constructed at Cherryvale Playing Fields;*
- 2. The Gaelic Association is currently contributing £350,000 to the development of a replacement sand based natural turf pitch with floodlighting, however, this funding is predicated on Council investment in the site;*
- 3. There are objections to the proposals and these range from those who do want any artificial surface to those who wish to displace it to an alternative location in the playing fields; objectors can make submissions via the planning process;*
- 4. There is support from the 3 sporting codes for the provision of an artificial turf pitch which will increase the availability for each of the sports; in addition St Joseph's College which is adjacent to the playing fields has also highlighted the benefit to the school;*
- 5. It is the view of Officers that Option 2 as amended represents the best sporting option particularly given the major investment by Council and should be progressed to planning at which time issues around noise; lighting etc can be addressed within the statutory framework.*

3 Resource Implications

Financial

There are cost implications of replacing Pitch 1 with 3G and establishing a grass pitch in another location on the site. Cost estimated to be £300,000 and no budget has been established to support this.

Human Resources

There are no additional human resource implications at this time.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

4.1 There are no equality implications

5 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to agree that Option 2 as amended be submitted to Planning for consideration at which times representation on matters relating to planning can be considered.”

The Committee received the following deputations:

St. Joseph’s College

Mr. B. Gibson, Chairman of the Board of Governors of St. Joseph’s College, was admitted to the meeting and he outlined the school’s support for the proposal to establish the 3G pitch within the playing fields. He made the following points:

- the establishment of a facility at Cherryvale would enhance sporting provision for the pupils of St. Joseph’s College and other local schools;*
- the demand for first-rate sporting facilities was increasing within the general area;*
- the issue of light pollution could be addressed by limiting the hours during which the pitch was available for sporting activities; and*
- the general enhancement of the facilities would address issues relating to disabled access and would increase participation in sport by young people.*

Mr. Gibson answered a number of Members’ questions and he then retired from the meeting.

Deputation in Support of the Proposals

The Committee then received Mr. G. Rogers and Mr. B. McKee, together with Masters J. McKee, L. Frances and Miss. E. Durkin, who were in attendance to speak in support of the proposal to locate the pitch within the playing fields.

Mr. Rogers suggested that a majority of local residents were in favour of the development of the playing fields to incorporate a 3G pitch. He indicated that the Roads Service had pointed out that the implementation of safety measures, such as the establishment of a pedestrian crossing on the Ravenhill Road, would be dependent on the development proceeding. He added that the growth of soccer, rugby and Gaelic Games within the general area required that such a facility be established. Each of the young people in attendance then outlined how the enhancement of the facilities would address the requirements of local teams and requested that the Committee look favourably upon the proposal.

The deputation then retired from the meeting.

Knock Eden Residents’ Association

The Committee then received Ms. G. Agnew, Ms. G. Connolly, Ms. G. Dunphy and Ms. A. Given, objectors to the proposal, and they proceeded to outline their concerns.

Ms. Dunphy pointed out that the playing fields were located within an area which was distinctly residential in nature. She suggested that the proposed development would impact adversely on the amenity of the playing fields and referred to issues of light pollution and the possibility of an increase in anti-social activity arising from the development. She referred to the need to protect the requirements of casual users of the playing fields and suggested that the Council had given preference to sporting organisations over such users. In conclusion, she suggested further that the Council had not given sufficient opportunity for local residents to engage meaningfully in respect of the proposals and stated that the development would be out of character with the playing fields.

The deputation answered a range of Members' questions and then retired from the meeting.

Deputation in Support of an Alternative Location

The Committee then received Mr. E. Mulvenna, Miss. P. Haughan, Mr. T. Fearon, Mr. D. McPolin, Mr. P. Scott and Mr. E. Irwin representing a local residents' group who wished to advocate the establishment of the pitch at a separate site within the playing fields.

Mr. Fearon tabled for the information of the Committee an alternative proposal for the establishment of a 3G pitch. He outlined the principal aspects of the proposal and indicated that the alternative site which had been suggested would be in a central location and would see the establishment of a 3G pitch of approximately 90 metres by 60 metres. He pointed out that, given that the proposed pitch would not be full size, it would be suitable for some uses associated with Gaelic Games, rugby and Association Football, particularly training. He suggested that the objections which had been raised by local residents would be placated somewhat by the alternative proposal and, in addition, a significant grass training area would be retained for use by all sports.

The deputation then answered a range of Members' questions and retired from the meeting.

Representatives of the Sporting Bodies

(The Deputy Chairman, Councillor Mac Giolla Mhin, in the Chair.)

The Committee then received Mr. A. McKeagney and Mr. A. Rodgers, representing a local Gaelic and rugby club respectively, who spoke in favour of the proposal which had been submitted for the Committee's consideration. Both representatives outlined the benefits which would be realised by all of the sporting bodies should the proposal be adopted. In respect of the requirements of local Gaelic clubs, Mr. McKeagney indicated that the establishment of a full size pitch, as suggested by the proposal, would be crucial to address the need to play additional club games and address training requirements.

(The Chairman, Councillor McKee, in the Chair.)

The deputation then answered a range of Members' questions and then retired from the meeting.

After discussion, it was

*Moved by Councillor Ó Donnghaile,
Seconded by Councillor McCabe,*

That the Committee agrees to adopt the proposal as set out within the report.

Amendment

*Moved by Alderman Robinson,
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers,*

That the Committee agrees to defer, to its meeting on 14th November, consideration of the establishment of a 3G pitch at Cherryvale Playing Fields to enable further consideration to be given to the various proposals as presented.

On a vote by show of hands seven Members voted for the amendment and nine against and it was accordingly declared lost.

The original proposal in the name of Councillor Ó Donnghaile and seconded by Councillor McCabe was thereupon put to the meeting when nine Members voted for it and seven against and it was declared carried."

Accordingly, pursuant to the decision of the Council of 2nd December, the Assistant Director tabled the undernoted report for the Committee's consideration:

"1. Relevant Background Information

The Committee will be aware that at the Council meeting on 2nd December it was agreed that the decision in relation to Cherryvale Playing Fields, as agreed at a Special Meeting of the Parks and Leisure Committee on 5th November 2013, be taken back for further consideration.

The decision of the Committee was that the preferred option – attached as Option 1 be worked up and a planning application be submitted. This followed consideration of reports from Officers at the October 2012 meeting, a site visit by Elected Members and representations by representatives of residents and other users on the matter received at the Special Meeting.

Members will be aware that following further representation in the form of an alternate proposal from a group of some residents and non sporting affiliated users to Elected Members it was agreed to refer the matter back to allow the Committee an opportunity to consider this alternate option – Option 2.

2. **Key Issues - Outline of options**

Option 1

Members are reminded that Option 1 is the preferred option of officers following lengthy discussions with the three sporting bodies that currently use the playing fields and wider consultation with residents and users after consideration of a range of other options all of which were discounted.

Whilst this option does not have unanimous support, in the view of officers this represents the best sporting solution and best use of the space available.

Option 2

Option 2 represents a compromise on the part of some of the residents and non sports affiliated users in so far as it does not seek to reduce the size and scale of the sporting offering. It is presented as an option which seeks to satisfy the sporting codes whilst at the same time recognising the concerns of some of the residents / non-sporting users. It does so by altering the configuration of the proposed artificial turf pitch and proposed natural turf pitch, as outlined as Option 2.

Members are asked to note that:

- 1. This solution fits the space available; and**
- 2. It has support from one of the interest groups involved in discussions about the proposals**

However the followings concerns should be considered:

- (a) Members will also note the proximity to the car park and playground, this is a concern; whilst it will be noted that there is an existing soccer pitch in close proximity to the car park, the risk is in relation to the potential damage / injury from small ball sports such as Hurling or Camogie if the GAA pitch is in this location – this may require high level fencing / ball stop netting along the side of the pitch as opposed to the proposed handrail.**
- (b) High fencing at this location will not be aesthetically pleasing.**
- (c) The free space adjacent to the car park in Option 1 is heavily used by GAA clubs for training purposes and the loss of this space would be detrimental to them. This loss of this space also limits the opportunity to extend the car park to this side.**
- (d) The proximity of the artificial turf pitch to trees will require more intensive management owing to the potential to obstruct drainage. Members will be aware that leaves can be left on grass pitches, this is not the case with artificial turf pitches.**

- (e) **Members will note that the proposal will, during construction, result in the removal or loss of two soccer pitches which will require arrangements to be made for displacement, one of the pitches will be replaced on the existing rugby pitch as indicated, however, this is unlikely to be the case until the construction works is completed.**
- (f) **This alternate proposal does not command the support of all of those opposed to the development. It remains probable that there will be objections raised through the planning process. Soccer did not raise any issue with the proposal and Rugby did not respond. GAA however highlighted many of the points already made, in particular health and safety and the potential for increased anti social behaviour by creating a soccer pitch in the corner with visibility obstructed from the entrance.**

- 3. **Feedback on option 1 has been received proposing that the 3G pitch and natural turf pitch should be ‘flipped’ to locate the 3G pitch adjacent to the school perimeter. This is on the basis that it would be more aesthetically pleasing than having high fencing located in the middle of the playing fields. This option is feasible and although the maintenance issues remain, could present a compromise solution.**

3. **Resource Implications**

Financial

Option 1 can be delivered within the existing budget. Option 2 will require additional fencing/ball stops because of the close proximity to the car park and playground. Costs for additional fencing have yet to be determined.

4. **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to consider the options presented and determine which option should proceed to planning.

The Assistant Director outlined the principal aspects of the additional report and answered a range of Members’ questions in relation thereto.

Proposal

*Moved by Councillor Mullan,
Seconded by Councillor Ó Donnghaile,*

That the Committee agrees to rescind its decision of 5th November and approve Option 1, as presented, namely, the preferred departmental option, subject to the amendment that the 3G pitch would be located at the Aquinas Grammar School end of the Cherryvale Playing Fields.

Amendment

*Moved by Alderman Robinson,
Seconded by Councillor Hussey,*

*That the Committee agrees to rescind its decision of 5th November
and endorses the revised residents' proposal as tabled for consideration.*

*On a vote by show of hands, seven Members voted for the
amendment and eleven against and it was declared lost.*

*The proposal standing in the name of Councillor Mullan and
seconded by Councillor Ó Donnghaile was thereupon put to the meeting
where it was passed by eleven votes to six.”*