



Report to: Communities Committee, 8th June 2022

Report of: Corporate Director, Operations, Homes & Communities

Subject: PROVISION OF A NEW ARTIFICIAL GRASS PITCH AT PERDISWELL

1. Recommendation

That the Committee:

- 1.1 Approve the progression of a business case and detailed design for a multi-use Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) at Perdiswell;**
- 1.2 Recommend to Council an 'in principle' capital allocation of £200k that is required to unlock specialist support from the Football Foundation to facilitate the development of a business case and detailed design;**
- 1.3 Note that the Council would be required to pay costs of up to £10k should the Football Foundation or the Council decide the project is no longer viable as part of the application process.**

2. Background

- 2.1 At its meeting of 10 July 2018, the Income Generation Sub-Committee considered a report into a number of potential sports developments including tennis provision, hockey and football, particularly in respect of five-a-side football pitches and pitches suitable for all-weather use. The Committee agreed to provide £25,000 to fund a feasibility study into the potential development of a Futsal facility and an Artificial Grass Pitch.
- 2.2 A range of assessments were undertaken, and reports prepared for Committee in winter 2019/20 which were deferred due to focus on other developments. At the same time, the Football Foundation published its priorities for football development in Worcester and included an identified need for additional small-sided playing pitches and AWP provision. The Local Football Foundation Plan (LFFP) was presented to, and approved by, the Communities Committee at its meeting of 29th January 2020.
- 2.3 The assessments included a proposed business case for each facility. As the financial information which supported these proposals was out of date it was necessary to undertake revisions in the light of cost increases that have been experienced on other capital works because of the Covid-19 Pandemic and supply chain issues.
- 2.4 At its meeting of 10 November 2021, the Income Generation Sub-Committee agreed to commission the necessary revised costings and receive a report on whether the schemes remain financially viable. The work was commissioned from Raise Partnership and the report concluded that both the All-Weather Pitch and Futsal schemes

remained financially viable, with the AGP project dependent upon receipt of a grant from the Football Foundation, the terms and conditions of which requires that surplus income derived from the facility would need to be ring-fenced to it for future maintenance and re-provision. It was also agreed that a report would be prepared for the future consideration of the Communities Committee to consider proposals for taking the AGP project forward.

- 2.5 At its meeting of 9th March 2022, the Income Generation Sub-Committee noted updated cost models for Futsal and a full-sized Artificial Grass Pitch at Perdiswell and agreed to receive a further report on the creation of additional new five-a-side pitches at the rear of the Leisure Centre.
- 2.6 The current position is that the Football Foundation need to see a complete business case and approve it. At this point they have provisionally allocated a specialist to work with the Council to reach approval stage, but require a capital commitment by the Council.
- 2.7 To provide further context in common with every local area across England, the Football Association, supported by the Premier League and Sport England, produced an LFFP in conjunction with the Football Foundation, Worcester City Council, and the County Sports Partnership for Herefordshire and Worcestershire, which feeds into the National Football Facility Strategy.
- 2.8 The purpose of this strategy is to target significantly increased investment from the national funding partners into more and better facilities for the grassroots game. Projects listed within the LFFP may benefit from funding from the Football Foundation.
- 2.9 The plan identifies priority projects for Worcester accordingly. These are grouped into the 4 FA priorities:
 - New 3G football turf pitches
 - Improved natural turf pitches
 - New changing pavilions / clubhouses
 - Improved small-sided facilities (e.g., Futsal/Five-a-side football)
- 2.10 These national priorities are supplemented by the priorities of the Regional FA in respect of each locality. For Worcester these have been identified as:
 - Disability Football
 - Female Football
 - Just Play
 - Small Sided Football.
- 2.11 The number one Priority Project within the LFFP highlights the need for a new 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) at Perdiswell Leisure Centre.
- 2.12 The latest Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS) for Worcester (December 2021) which was produced as an evidence-based document as part of the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review for Worcester, also highlights a short fall of three 3G pitches in the city. Perdiswell Leisure Centre is referred to as the priority site, with two pitch conversions (sand dressed to 3G) at the University and Nunnery Wood Sports Complex also listed, along with reference to a nearby

alternative location as a recognised local alternative venue should the Perdiswell project not be approved by committee.

- 2.13 The Local Football Facilities Plan for Worcester links to the latest PPOSS strategy and both documents identify Perdiswell as the highest-ranking priority location in the area for enhancement. This is supported by the existing infrastructure that is already in place such as adjacent changing, shower and toilet facilities, car parking and café facilities for spectators.

3. Business case

- 3.1 Projects listed within the LFFP are able to benefit from funding from the Football Foundation and following discussions with representatives from the Worcestershire Football Association and the Football Foundation on the 4th April 2022 the Delivery Manager (West Midlands region) confirmed that the Football Foundation are about to enter into a three year funding cycle with the largest budget they've received since the organisation was founded in the year 2000, and that there is a strong likelihood that the proposal would benefit from grant funding of 75% of the costs of approximately £800,000.
- 3.2 The following table provides an approximate high-level construction budget breakdown:

Item	£
New 3G AGP	£760,000.00
Fees and Contingencies	£40,000.00
Total	£800,000.00

- 3.3 The financial business case, based on budgetary figures, for providing the new pitch at Perdiswell is as follows:

Item (Capital)	£
Cost of Construction	800,000
Football Foundation Grant	(600,000)
Net Cost	200,000
Item (Revenue)	£
Cost of borrowing	8,400
Lifecycle Costs	35,000
Maintenance	25,000
Total Costs (per annum)	68,400
Projected Annual Income	(90,000)
Net Surplus	(21,600)

- 3.4 These figures are based on proven demand and existing income achieved for other artificial grass pitches in the city.
- 3.5 The projected surplus is in line with expectations of the Football Foundation. There may be funding conditions within the Football Foundation grant which requires evidence of the net 3G AGP surplus being re-invested in football facilities. This is designed to ensure that the facility is sustainable.

- 3.6 At this stage it is assumed the current booking arrangements undertaken by Freedom Leisure for the existing small-sided artificial pitches (refurbished in October 2021) will be extended to include the new AGP, with an adjustment in the management fee paid to the Council to be negotiated and agreement for any surplus income to be set aside as part of the creation of a sinking fund.
- 3.7 The preferred option is to construct a new 3G AGP to the side of the building at right angles to the 6 current grass pitches and adjacent to the existing Football Foundation changing accommodation.
- 3.8 Investigations into the site conditions have concluded that it is suitable for a 3G AGP.
- 3.9 In respect of changing room capacity, currently Perdiswell has 8 full size changing rooms funded by a grant from the Football Foundation in 2006, and this is considered adequate and able to cater for any increased demand.

4. Alternative Options Considered

Do nothing

- 4.1 The do-nothing option was discounted as this is an opportunity for the Council to benefit from substantial grant funding and to continue to invest in the provision of sport and activity at the City Council's flagship leisure centre.

Alternative locations

- 4.2 With regards to the location of the 3G AGP, other alternative options have been considered.
- 4.3 The first was to locate it at the rear of the Leisure Centre. However, a 3G AGP in this location would require the loss of hedgerow, trees and public open space from the old golf course; increasing light and noise pollution into this area. Test pit investigations have shown it would also have required construction in the landfill area, adding to cost and potential environmental concerns.
- 4.4 A further issue with using the land behind the Leisure Centre is that it would remove the future capacity for dedicated Futsal/5-a-side/football facilities. The proposed indoor Futsal Centre also requires a smaller footprint than the AGP and does not require the loss of the hedge or public open space on the old Golf Course and does not introduce lighting or noise into this area.
- 4.5 Using the area at the rear of the Leisure Centre for the provision of the new AGP would also necessitate the need to demolish the two existing small 5-a-side pitches which were refurbished by Freedom Leisure in October 2021 and which would therefore require a reimbursement from the Council.
- 4.6 The second option for the introduction of a 3G AGP in the Perdiswell area is to locate it at a nearby location, subject to their validation of the suitability of their site. Meetings with both the Worcestershire Football Association and the Football Foundation have confirmed that they have been in conversation with a local partner about this option and have indicated that should the LFFP/PPOSS preferred option of Perdiswell not proceed then that site would be considered as an alternative.

The Council would be prepared to work in partnership with the alternative provider to support their proposal.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

These are included in the report. If the proposal does not go forward the Council will be expected to contribute £10,000 towards the Football Foundation's costs. A Leisure Developments Reserve was previously created to support such opportunities. It has an uncommitted balance of £31,203 at 31 March 2022 but is subject to a potential withdrawal of £10,000 for an item elsewhere on the June 2022 Communities Committee agenda.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

The proposal for the new AGP at Perdiswell would require it to be sited on land currently designated as public open space. Subject to the local policies in a local development plan, if land is held as public open space it cannot be disposed of unless the process under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) is used. The disposal must be advertised, and objections considered before any disposal can take place.

Furthermore, Perdiswell was subject to a Council Motion (that was approved) in November 2016 which stated that: *'The freehold of Perdiswell is owned by this Council and is established public open space. In the interests of local democracy this Council believes Perdiswell should remain so and not be sold, leased, transferred or given away for any other purpose than its current designated status. Should any proposal to sell, lease, transfer or give away land at Perdiswell come forward Full Council should determine any such proposal rather than Officer delegation or Cabinet'*.

Planning permission would also be required for an artificial grass pitch at this location and both the Council and the Local Football Foundation will work with the Planning Authority in respect of an application should a final business case be approved by The Local Football Foundation Board, and separately Worcester City Council.

Should the Council be successful in its application for Grant funding from the Football Foundation, further decision(s) may be required to accept the funding and any conditions associated with it.

5.3 Risk Implications

As this project has a defined scope, the risk of cost escalation in Capital Build estimates has been mitigated by thorough investigation of the prevailing ground conditions, detailed design considerations and working with different specialist suppliers and technical advisors to arrive at robust cost estimates. The proposed feasibility studies will provide similar comfort on any further projects on this site, which will in any case be brought back to Committee for review.

Similar measures have been put in place to ensure accuracy in the business revenue model forecast, which are either based on established income achieved at similar facilities owned by the Council in Worcester, or from information from the Football Foundation, or from the sports management/consultancy sectors. These have a great deal of uniformity, which gives a high level of confidence in the projections. This equally applies to forecast running, maintenance and lifecycle costs of the facility to mitigate any risk of the facility becoming unsustainable or unable to support its own replacement costs.

The risk of the AGP proposal for Perdiswell not getting planning permission is mitigated by the existence of alternative planning permissions for the site.

The risk in respect of the construction phases of the project will be mitigated by the procurement of independent Programme Management, to manage the Programme and oversee constituent elements, from design and funding application/agreement through to completion.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

The proposals in this report are compliant with, and supportive of, the LFFP and recently updated PPOSS in respect of the improvement of 3G AGP provision in the city.

The proposals in this report support Theme 3 of the City Plan – a Healthy and Active City.

5.5 Equality Implications

As stated in 2.9 the LFFP sets out to support the development of the Worcestershire Football Associations key strategic priorities.

All of the proposals in the FFP are therefore designed to promote equality and inclusivity in sport by ensuring that there is capacity for all genders, abilities, disabilities, ages and backgrounds, regardless of social position or affordability considerations.

The additional capacity for all forms of football at Perdiswell resulting from this proposal will mean more people can participate in the sport. Currently the six grass football pitches are mainly used by Worcester City Football Club Youth FC at weekends. However, due to a lack of local training facilities they currently have to use six different venues both within and outside the city to meet their demand.

The Club also have an ambition to quadruple the number of girls teams.

It is the Council's intention that the proposed full sized AGP will meet the required regulations to permit match fixtures to be played on the surface at weekends, with local Sunday league teams able to benefit from the excellent facilities that would be on offer, whilst also reducing undue wear and tear on the existing grass pitches.

The proposal will therefore make a contribution to the Council's aim to further strengthen Worcester's growing national and international reputation as a centre for inclusive sport.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

There are no HR implications for the Council in respect of these proposals.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

There are no Health and Safety Implications for the Council in respect of these proposals.

5.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

The Social benefits of the proposals are indicated by the number of measures supported against Theme 3 of the City Plan and in respect of the equality/inclusivity benefits outlined in section 5.5. More people from different ability ranges will be able to participate in football. This all helps to build strong communities and reduce social isolation.

The 'turn up and play' and 'free of charge' aspect of the Community facilities, is of particular benefit to casual players or those who do not have access to or the financial or time resources to commit to playing for a Chartered Football Club. In this respect the proposals will play an important role in providing easier access to 'football' for those from unprivileged backgrounds via programmes organised, promoted and delivered by Freedom Leisure's Active Communities team.

Environmental consequences of the proposals have been considered throughout and articulated in Section 4 where relevant. The proposed 3G AGP would introduce floodlighting and some additional evening noise into to the area between the Leisure Centre and existing Grass Pitches. However, the Light Spill analysis for the proposed lighting scheme shows lighting would be limited to the curtilage of the pitch and the distance from residential properties would mean that noise nuisance would be minimal.

The proposal will also bring economic benefits to Worcester in terms of a healthier population.

Ward(s): Claines and St Stephen Wards

Contact Officer: Lloyd Griffiths – Corporate Director – Operations, Homes & Communities
Tel: 01905 722536
E-mail: Lloyd.griffiths@worcester.gov.uk

Background Papers: None