



Report to: Communities Committee, 8th June 2022

Report of: Corporate Director, Operations, Homes & Communities

Subject: INSTALLATION OF A MUNICIPAL ARTIFICIAL CRICKET WICKET

1. Recommendation

That the Committee note the use of the Managing Director's urgency powers for the release of funding for the installation of an artificial cricket wicket at King George V Playing Fields.

2. Background

- 2.1 At its meeting of 22nd January, the Committee approved a proposed budget allocation of £10,000 for the provision of an artificial cricket wicket. The proposal was subsequently approved by Policy & Resources Committee and Full Council at the February budget meetings. However, at the Council meeting on 22 February, the Chair of the Committee noted that the proposed location of the pitch had yet to be finalised.
- 2.2 At the previous meeting, the Committee received a report that identified that the City does not have a municipal cricket wicket for hire or free public use. The report also showed that, further to the increased interest in cricket at grass roots level following the England cricket team's World Cup success in 2019 and the more recent launch of the one-day Hundred competition, interest in grass roots cricket is growing.
- 2.3 Local demand is further identified by the numbers of children who attend the ECB 'Inspiring Generations' programme. All Stars Cricket is a development pathway for 5-8 year olds and was established in 2017 and encourages junior players to progress onto Dynamos Cricket (8-11 years).
- 2.4 All Stars Cricket seeks to engage children in cricket activity and learning the skills. Dynamos Cricket, launched in 2021, seeks to engage children in learning how to play, introducing a modified soft ball format as competitive progression with a view to eventual transition through to hardball cricket. The programme is also strongly linked to The Hundred competition.
- 2.5 Another format of the game is 'tape ball' which is a tennis ball that has been modified to give it greater weight, speed and distance while still being easier to play with than the conventional cricket ball. The variation was pioneered in Karachi, Pakistan and is credited with Pakistan's famous production of fast bowlers, as children are brought up playing the game using a tape ball in which various skills are developed. The increasing popularity of tape ball in informal, local cricket has transformed the way games are played in cricket-loving nations such as India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, but most famously Pakistan.

2.6 The demand for 'tape ball' cricket and other shorter formats of the game has increased substantially and traditional local cricket clubs are not able to cater for all these formats. As a result, recreational cricketers have been 'locked out' of the game due to the need to pay membership fees to access facilities at local clubs, or such clubs being unable to meet the variation of demands and therefore some local cricketers are having to travel to Droitwich and Lower Moor to access the type of facilities they require.

3. Information

3.1 Following consultation with Ward Councillors (Rainbow Hill), the Council's City Services team, Worcester Community Trust and immediate residents, KGV Playing Fields at Brickfields was identified as the most suitable location and it is proposed to install a surface to meet the following specification;

- A professional system which is approved by the ECB (England and Wales Cricket Board) which is surfaced with a high density superior woven cricket carpet that is free draining, spike resistant and responsive to spin and seam bowling.
- The synthetic components are all manufactured in the UK to meet stringent quality checks and BS:EN requirements.
- That the appointed contractor installs the surface themselves and does not sub contract any of the works to ensure the quality finish required.

3.2 Following installation, City Services would be required to put a heavy roller over the surface on a weekly basis in the early stages, to protect the longevity of the product.

3.3 The artificial pitch installation will also generate a modest income for the council as bookings for organised matches would be required via the City Services team (in the same way the grass football pitches are booked on the site) and this income could be utilised to offset the cost of any light touch maintenance work in the longer term.

3.4 The projected lifespan of the surface would be a minimum of 10 years and longer with a preventative maintenance schedule in place.

4. Update

4.1 A pitch of 30m x 2.74m in dimension costs £8,950, net of VAT, which includes the removal of all excavated spoil from the site. Funding for this project has been taken from the Leisure Developments Reserve, which had a balance of £31,203 at 31 March 2022.

4.2 Due to the specialist nature of the product a procurement exemption has been approved by the Corporate Director for Operations, Homes and Communities and endorsed by the Procurement Manager.

4.3 The installation will take two days to complete but is very weather-dependent as ground conditions underfoot will need to be dry and firm to prevent any surface damage. The appointed contractor has provisionally pencilled in dates in late June but may be able to bring this forward if other projects finish earlier than expected. The contractor has agreed to hold the current price until July 2022. Installation by the end of June will allow for the new surface to be accessible for the second half of the cricket season which, for 2022, runs until 29th September.

- 4.4 The restrictions of the above timescale meant that an urgent decision was required to approve the project and let the contract. Therefore, a decision was taken at the Corporate Leadership Team meeting on Tuesday 10 May 2022 to proceed with utilising the Managing Director's urgency powers.
- 4.5 In line with the Councils Constitution, the Chair and Vice Chair (Cllrs Riaz (Lab) & Cleary (Con)) of Communities Committee were consulted (18th May 2022) on the Managing Directors Urgency Powers Report and they too supported the recommendation to proceed with the release of funding for this project.
- 4.6 Use of Managing Director Urgency Powers requires a follow-up report to be presented to the next available relevant committee, making Members aware of the decision that has been taken.
- 4.7 The Senior Planning Officer has confirmed that no planning consents are required in the completion of the approved works as per the pre-application Planning Ref: 22/00329/PA dated 19th April 2022.

Ward(s): **Rainbow Hill**

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Background Papers: **N/A**