



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

*Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny
Committee*

Scrutiny Project Group

report on

*Future Use of Former Queen's Park
Sports Centre Site*

3 October, 2019

Project Group Members:

Councillors:

Lead	Gordon Simmons
Group Members	Peter Barr Ray Catt Kate Caulfield Keith Miles
Project Group officer support was provided by Brian Offiler, Democratic and Scrutiny Officer	

1.0 Introduction and Review Aims

- 1.1 Following the public consultation exercise in late 2016 on the potential uses of the former Queen's Park Sports Centre site and the petition in support of the development of an ice rink presented to Council on 23 February, 2017, Cabinet had approved the development of a full business case for the preferred option of artificial sports pitches on the site on 7 March, 2017.
- 1.2 The setting up of the Scrutiny Project Group arose from the annual scrutiny work programming process for 2017/18 and was approved by the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum on 9 May, 2017, in order to contribute to the development of the full business case, providing a wider Member and community perspective.
- 1.3 The project supported the Council Plan priorities 'to improve the quality of life for local people' and 'to provide value for money services'.
- 1.4 Within these priorities, the project focused on the objectives 'to improve the health and wellbeing of people', 'to reduce inequality

and support the more vulnerable members of our communities' and 'to become financially self-sufficient by 2020'.

1.5 The aims of the Project Group were established as:

- To contribute to the development of the full business case for the preferred option of artificial sports pitches;
- To seek further information on the practical implications of operating an ice rink from operators of similar facilities, in the event of the Council being approached by an ice rink operator;
- To contribute further, acting as a 'sounding board' and monitoring progress during the design and building stage of the chosen use once this has been decided by Cabinet.

1.6 The Group's Project Start Report, including these aims, was approved by the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 25 July, 2017.

2.0 Interim Report – December 2017

2.1 The Project Group submitted an interim report to Cabinet in December, 2017, summarising its conclusions on the development of the full business case for the preferred option of artificial sports pitches. The Group's report supported the preferred option emerging from the development of the full business case for the restoration of the area to parkland to include one 7x7 sports pitch.

2.2 The Group's report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 5 December, 2017, along with the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing's report recommending approval of the development of an artificial sports pitch. Cabinet endorsed the business case for providing an artificial sports pitch on the site and approved this preferred option in principle, subject to the outcome of the

heritage assessment that was being undertaken. (Cabinet Minute No. 92, 2017/18)

- 2.3 At its meeting on 13 December, 2017, full Council approved the proposed allocation within the capital programme to cover the capital investment required for the preferred option and approved the inclusion of the revised income and expenditure figures for the new facility within the budget setting process for 2018/19 and beyond, in line with the estimates set out in the business case. (Council Minute No. 59, 2017/18)

3.0 Approach of Further Review

- 3.1 Within its interim report in December, 2017, the Project Group recognised that in pursuing this preferred option the Council would need to ensure that it had sufficiently explored options for sports pitches on other sites, such as behind the new sports centre, to determine whether any other realistic options were available.

- 3.2 The Project Group identified in its interim report that the detailed design of the preferred option would need to give careful consideration to:

- The extent to which the heritage value of the park could be protected and enhanced without merely returning to a previous design prior to the construction of the original sports centre;
- The relationship between the sports pitch and the park, including encouraging access between the two (to enable wider participation and enjoyment of both facilities), fencing of the pitch which was not obtrusive, landscaping and planting to mitigate any adverse visual impacts;

- Physical security of both the park and the sports pitch, especially at times when the park may be closed but the sports pitch was being used;
- The park boundary along Boythorpe Road, including possible reintegration of the original park gates;
- Provision of some pitch-side shelter for spectators;
- Detailed examination of the costings for work to be undertaken, especially in respect of park landscaping and planting, and consideration of scope for this to be done in-house, utilising the experience gained from the restoration of Eastwood Park, and exploration of any available funding options;
- Operational arrangements for the sports pitch and the relationship to arrangements for the existing MUGA pitch within the park.

3.3 Since December, 2017 the Project Group has continued to act as a 'sounding board' and to monitor progress during the design and building stage of the chosen use, as set out in the Group's original aims, and taking account of the proposed considerations set out in paragraph 3.2 above.

3.4 The Project Group considered the heritage statement which had been prepared to assess the impact of the proposed development of the artificial pitch on the heritage asset of the wider park, including consideration of an alternative location for the artificial pitch behind the new sports centre. The heritage statement identified disadvantages of this alternative location in respect of the landform, environmental restrictions, impact on the existing infrastructure and the visibility of the location.

3.5 The Group noted the heritage statement's conclusion that any harm to the heritage asset arising from development of the sports

pitch on the proposed site would be outweighed by benefits in respect of providing access not only to this specific sports facility, but also to the wider park facilities, thus contributing to the wider objective of promoting health and wellbeing.

- 3.6 The Group also considered and supported the design and access statement which had been prepared to set out the design for the proposed sports pitch, including fencing, floodlighting and associated landscape and boundary treatments to be consistent with the original design of the park.
- 3.7 The Group received regular progress reports during 2018 and the early part of 2019 relating to the preparation of the planning application, the process for procuring the construction of the sports pitch and associated landscaping and the plans for marketing and operation of the sports pitch.

Planning Approval Process

- 3.8 Planning approval for the development was granted in August, 2018, subject to conditions in respect of surface water drainage, investigation of coal mining legacy issues, ecological and tree surveys, boundary treatments and planting, the lighting installation, highways issues, landscaping and tree protection measures.
- 3.9 As a result of the further surveys and ground investigations, particularly in respect of difficulties encountered in identifying the precise location of a recorded mine shaft, it was subsequently proposed to revise the position of the sports pitch within the site in order to minimise the need for mitigating features for the mine shaft and to avoid the need to relocate an electricity substation or divert utility services. The Project Group supported this revised positioning of the sports pitch as it was more in keeping with the surrounding landform, was further away from residential properties and would enable the project to be delivered within the agreed budget.

- 3.10 The Project Group welcomed the detailed consideration which had been given to the design of the floodlights to minimise light pollution to neighbouring properties and the impact on wildlife and to the design of the boundary fencing and park entrance to be consistent with the original fencing, pillars and gates.
- 3.11 It was noted that there had been very positive consultation with the Friends of Queen's Park group during the design of the development.
- 3.12 The revised positioning of the sports pitch required amendment of a number of the planning conditions, which was granted in August, 2019.

Procurement and Construction Stage

- 3.13 The construction of the sports pitch and associated work was procured through a framework contract, which was delivered by Alliance Leisure UK and their partner sub-contractors. This arrangement provided the Council with cost certainty within its agreed budget for the project and included the additional ground survey work to meet the planning conditions, provision of sports pitch equipment and marketing, communications and staff training activities in addition to the constructing of the pitch and preparation of the surrounding area for landscaping and planting, which would be undertaken by the Council's Environmental Services team during the autumn of 2019.
- 3.14 The Project Group recognised that the framework contract arrangement had worked well and that there had been an effective and flexible approach from the contractor, which had identified practical solutions to address issues, such as mitigating the impact of the recorded mine shaft. This positive working relationship had enabled construction of the pitch to continue, pending approval of the amended planning conditions, resulting in a good quality facility being provided in a timely manner to the

Council in August, 2019 within the agreed budget of £648,388. This had included an element of future proofing by incorporating brackets for higher pitchside fencing should this be required at a future stage.

- 3.15 It was noted that the pitch surface had an 8 – 10 year life expectancy.
- 3.16 The Project Group noted that cycle racks had been provided to encourage access to the facility from the adjacent cycle network and that a hardstanding area was available for spectators. It accepted that a sheltered area for spectators had not been included due to concerns that this could be subject to misuse.
- 3.17 The Project Group was impressed with the security control features which had been incorporated within the design, including CCTV coverage of the pitch which could be monitored from the Sports Centre with an intercom link and capacity to link to the Council's overall CCTV monitoring system, access control to the pitch specific for each booking and lighting controlled remotely from the Sports Centre.
- 3.18 Any required tree protection work and final landscaping and planting work around the pitch was being undertaken by the Council's own in-house teams, with sympathetic and low maintenance tree planting and soft landscaping scheduled to take place in the autumn of 2019 at a total cost including all required ongoing maintenance for a full one year period of £36,844.

Marketing and Operation

- 3.19 The Project Group supported the plans at an early stage for the new sports pitch to be managed from the Queen's Park Sports Centre, along with the existing multi-use games area (MUGA) on the Queen's Park site, facilitating the optimum use of both pitches. It noted the practical advantages of the lighting being controlled

remotely from the Sports Centre and pitch entry being keypad controlled.

- 3.20 In considering the approach to the marketing of the new sports pitch, the Project Group recognised the importance of balancing the needs to achieve a commercial return and to provide opportunities for community and health and wellbeing development. It noted the work undertaken by officers with the Chesterfield FC Community Trust to develop links with community organisations in order to maximise the use of the facility.
- 3.21 The Group was pleased to note that there had been significant interest at an early stage from existing groups and leagues in using the facility. By the beginning of September 2019 block bookings had been received for 92% of the peak times.
- 3.22 The Group noted the work undertaken to benchmark prices against similar pitches locally, and it supported the proposed pricing structure to offer discounts at off-peak times and for schools and sports partnerships and the working with Chesterfield College and local schools to encourage such use. It was of the view that this approach would enable community use of the facility at the same time as aiming to generate a positive impact on the net controllable budget within a reasonable time period.

4.0 Appreciation

- 4.1 The Project Group would like to place on record its appreciation of the significant assistance and cooperation provided within this further part of its review by Ian Waller, Assistant Director – Health and Wellbeing and also by Councillor John Dickinson, Assistant Cabinet Member (until May, 2019).
- 4.2 The Group also noted the appreciation expressed by the Assistant Director of the constructive support provided in delivering the

development from the Council's Planning and Legal services and from Alliance Leisure UK as the main contractor.

5.0 Review Findings and Conclusions

- 5.1 The Project Group has welcomed the opportunity to continue to act as a 'sounding board' and to monitor progress during the design and building stage of the sports pitches.
- 5.2 In monitoring the progress of the development, the Project Group has taken account of the considerations it proposed within its interim report to Cabinet in December, 2017 (as detailed at paragraph 3.2 above), and it has formed the following conclusions:
- 5.2.1 The design of the sports pitch and the surrounding landscaping has protected and enhanced the heritage value of the park. The relocating of the sports pitch within the site, although not initially envisaged, has contributed to this as the pitch is more in keeping with the existing landform. The design of the park boundary fencing, pillars and gates on Boythorpe Road has enhanced the appearance consistent with the heritage aspects.
- 5.2.2 The design of the sports pitch enables a clearer view of the rest of the park from the pitch and from the public highway beyond it, encouraging access to and use of both the sports pitch and the wider park facilities. It is expected that as the proposed planting and soft landscaping around the pitch matures, this will soften the visual impact of the fencing, and that with appropriate but minimal maintenance the clear visibility into the park will be retained.
- 5.2.3 The anticipated use of the sports pitch, particularly during evenings, will enable greater visibility into the park, reducing the risk of security breaches and anti-social behaviour in the surrounding area. The CCTV coverage and the keypad controlled entry to the sports pitch is designed to prevent unauthorised use.

5.2.4 The provision of a hardstanding area for spectators was appropriate without this including a sheltered area, in order to minimise the risk of such a shelter being misused or attracting anti-social behaviour.

5.2.5 The use of the Council's in-house services to undertake the soft landscaping and tree planting was an appropriate use of internal expertise, taking account of the need for this to be consistent with ongoing low maintenance demands.

5.2.6 The marketing and pricing structure for the sports pitch was designed to enable use of the pitch by a variety of existing and community groups as well as seeing income levels reach a market mature level within three years.

5.2.7 Operational arrangements to manage the sports pitch from the Queen's Park Sports Centre were practical and realistic and facilitated the optimum use of both the new pitch and the existing MUGA pitch within the park.

5.3 The Project Group has been impressed by the effectiveness of the framework contract arrangement in delivering the design and construction of the sports pitch, particularly in the cost certainty which this has provided for the Council. It was recognised that the framework contract had enabled suitable solutions to be identified as issues had arisen with a minimum of delay and within budget.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 That the use of the new sports pitch be monitored through the Council's normal management processes against the objective of balancing the needs to achieve a commercial return and to provide opportunities for community and health and wellbeing development, and that the marketing approach and pricing

structure for the sports pitch be reviewed as necessary as part of the Council's overall marketing and pricing of its sports and leisure services.

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