
Meeting of the Executive Member for Leisure and Culture and Advisory Panel

4 December 2007

Report of the Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)

Football Pitches Strategy

Summary

1. This report advises member of the findings of Active York's (the city's Sport & Active Leisure partnership) playing pitch analysis and their plans for improving provision in the city. It also makes recommendations for how the Council can contribute to delivering this playing pitch strategy including developing a funding application and employing a project officer.

Background

2. A chapter of Active York's sport and active leisure strategy addresses supply and demand of turf playing fields. This sports pitch analysis and strategy (annex 1) has identified that the city currently has a shortage of mini and junior soccer pitches (31 and 9 respectively) and junior rugby league pitches (16). Taking into account population projections for 2015 and also assuming that the work that is being undertaken to increase participation in sport is successful, the deficit will increase to 64 mini soccer pitches, 17 Junior soccer pitches and 19 junior rugby pitches. However, there are a number of other pitches in the city that have not been included in the analysis, as they have no community access. Many of these are on school sites.
3. The analysis also considers pitch quality and identifies that the City has a significant problem with regard to the quality of the pitches available and their associated ancillary facilities. It specifically makes reference to the need for playing surfaces that are safe for match play and free from dog fouling. Many school sites have no community changing facilities and community club sites often have dated changing facilities with only single sex provision. Many pitches are uneven or poorly drained and in these cases usage is limited to weekly (or less) during wet weather in order to maintain league standards.
4. The strategy next identifies the key priorities for the city with regard to playing pitch provision. These include:
 - ensuring that sports people have access to safe and secure facilities which are managed and maintained appropriately and that cater for the specific needs of the users. We can no longer expect formal sport to be played on areas of open space at risk of dog fouling and littering, with no changing and ancillary facilities.

- retaining and enhancing existing sites. We must invest in existing sites to improve their quality and increase their capacity. Where clubs are already using and maintaining sites Active York will support the on-going use including where possible offering assistance with ground improvement and development.
 - The provision of new pitches should be through extension and expansion of existing high quality sustainable sites. New facilities must only be considered if they are filling an identified gap in provision and if a suitable infrastructure exists or can be created to manage and maintain them.
 - Sports trends and participation rates shift over time and the possibility of developing generic pitches or converting existing surplus pitches to generic ones that could be used for soccer, rugby league and rugby union, rounders or other sports activities should also be explored.
5. The strategy document then identifies a number of specific actions that should be undertaken within each geographical zone to help reduce the unmet demand for facilities. These include:
- Active York must continue to make recommendations to City of York Council on how developer's sports contributions can be spent in the zone to provide maximum community benefit.
 - Work should be undertaken with schools to encourage community use and the development of appropriate community use agreements to benefit both the schools and the community. This has to balance the need for pupil and young people's safety against the demands of open access.
 - Opportunities to improve the pitches on the Knavesmire should be explored including the possibility of isolating some pitches and limiting the access to them.
 - As development of the new facilities at Clifton Moor begins the site managers should be invited to participate in zone discussions about increasing community access to pitches, to help make the best use of any new pitches in the North.
 - As the new pitches are developed in the zone the operators must be supported to offer community access and assisted to provide sustainable high quality facilities
 - As the new synthetic pitch is developed in the zone the operators must be supported to offer community access and assisted to provide sustainable high quality facilities which complement the existing grass pitches.
6. In addition to the strategic work on facility needs, council officers are heavily involved in sports development related to the use of the city's pitches in particular football development work. Football is recognised as making a significant contribution to sport and physical activity levels in York (football is the second highest participation sport for males in York as shown in the national Active People participation survey). It takes many forms from the organised Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning leagues, to informal friendlies and casual kickabouts. Participation in the sport is rising particularly in junior football clubs, a rapidly developing ladies and girls league structure,

an increasing level of participation by people with disabilities and targeted groups with critically low participation levels in physical activity as shown by the Active People survey.

7. In recent years the sport of football has found itself relatively cash rich, mainly through the availability of significant funds from major TV deals, and able to invest in the sport at grass roots level. Funding from the Premier League, and a top slice of the sports lottery fund, has started to filter into football to sustain this development and develop wider participation in the Sport. This is vital to ensure the sustainability of the sport, and maintain high participation levels in light of competition from new and developing sports. The Football Foundation is the UK's largest sports charity and is funded by the Premier League, the FA, Sport England and the Government.
8. The Football Foundation has published criteria to support grass roots football bids for these funds. Their priority is provision and enhancement of grass playing pitches and ancillary facilities. In order to direct this funding to the areas where it can have the greatest impact all local authority areas have been asked to put together a local strategic football plan that can inform and advise all potential bids for external funds.

Consultation

9. Active York carried out extensive consultation with residents and sporting organisations in the city and the region during the preparation of the Playing pitches strategy papers. The document has the support of the geographic sports zones, the sport community and Sport England Yorkshire.
10. The Council are working with community club representatives on potential pitch improvements on the knavesmire; no project will be developed without their full commitment. Meetings have already taken place with senior representatives of the Football Foundation, which have highlighted their desire to support a project on the knavesmire that will reinstate the knavesmire as a hub for grass roots football. Any scheme developed would be the subject of extensive community consultation to ensure it is appropriate for all of the knavesmire's user groups.
11. Each of the community groups that are applying for Football Foundation support have begun local community consultation and as part of their application have to demonstrate that their schemes have local community backing.

Progress to date

12. A significant amount of work has been carried out on delivering the aspirations of the strategy by Active York and its partners, including the Council. Some examples are:
 - Active York has compiled an investment portfolio for the city, identifying projects, which would involve the creation, improvement and expansion of playing pitches and associated facilities.
 - The council has invested developers' Section 106 sports funding in projects to improve pitch drainage, develop changing facilities, acquire additional

land for junior pitches and to erect fencing to protect pitches from dog fouling.

- Approximately 20 voluntary sector clubs, including many junior football clubs, have made contact with the Football Foundation and the council about funding and support for their facility development schemes. These projects total around £5m in value.
- The Council has begun negotiations with a number of community organisations about the potential to improve the changing and ancillary facilities on the Knavesmire and to improve the playing conditions of some pitch areas.
- A number of additional schools have prepared community use agreements allowing community clubs access to additional pitches.

Options

13. Despite the progress that has been made so far there is still a great deal that can be done to enhance the city's pitch provision. The Council as the owner and operator of approximately 50% of the pitches (many on school sites) must play an important part in the work. The Council should continue to:
 - Encourage schools to invest in their sports facilities and to make them available for community use. Where appropriate section 106 monies could be invested to make facilities accessible by community groups. This may include contributions to fencing, floodlighting or pitch improvements.
 - Target section 106 funding directly into projects identified by Active York and the sports zones, following the principles set out in paragraph 4 above. The contributions that we are able to make with this funding is often small, but can be enough to draw down funding from other sources and to demonstrate the council's support for schemes.
 - Offer sports development and facility design and planning advice to voluntary and community sports clubs. This supports the clubs to apply for external funding, to articulate their plans for developing their sport and their club and to design facilities that best meet the needs of their users and comply with best practice design guidance.
14. There are now opportunities for the council to take an increased role in the delivery of the city's pitch strategy. The Football Foundation has indicated that, because of the existence of our pitch strategy, our enthusiastic voluntary sector and our investment plan, it is keen to work further with York on grass roots football development. They are keen to work with us to enable our approximately 20 projects to progress through the funding process. They are willing to assist us preparing a football specific plan for the city and for each of our projects that are approaching the foundation for funding to be embedded in the football delivery system for the city. To support this we have received an indication from the foundation that they are willing to contribute 50% funding towards a 5-year football project development officer for York on the condition that the Council can fund the remainder. The post holder would be required to:
 - Prepare a football development plan for the City of York Council

- Help the 20 or so projects that already exist to write their funding applications, sports development and business development plans.
- Help the groups mentioned above deliver their projects and to implement their plans
- Monitor how the groups have spent their grants and ensure that they are doing what they set out to do to make sure that football in the city benefits fully.

15. More specifically for the Council:

- The post holder would work with the Council and community groups to investigate how best to develop the pitches and ancillary facilities on the Knavesmire to meet the needs of all users. This project has been identified specifically by Active York as it will have a significant impact on the accessibility of pitch facilities in the city.
- If the project proves feasible, apply to the Football Foundation on behalf of the Council for funding for the Knavesmire project and using that funding and section 106 contributions project manage its delivery.

Analysis

16. Without this post the Sport & Active Leisure team will have no capacity to undertake any of the tasks listed above. This will not only limit the contribution the council can make to the city's pitch strategy but will also put all of the voluntary and community football projects at risk as there will be very limited resources to support these schemes. It is therefore proposed that subject to the availability of match funding authority to establish a post with an appropriate grade and job description is delegated to the Director of LCCS.

Corporate Priorities

17. Providing the widest and most accessible range of high quality sports and recreation facilities for the City is essential for the enjoyment and well being of the community and helps to deliver the council's priority of improving the health and lifestyles of the people of the city. Section 106 Agreements are important in ensuring that facilities are delivered and significantly contribute to improving the condition and appearance of publicly accessible spaces. As the Active People data indicates these projects are also key to offering opportunities to improve the life chances of targeted groups in the city.

Implications

Financial:

18. The development of the funding application has the potential to generate significant sums of capital resource for the city. The council's contribution to any capital schemes will be limited to allocating its S106 contributions and there is not expected to be any call on the council's own capital fund.
19. There are currently no revenue resources available within the Sports & Active Leisure budget to support the project officer post. Officers will explore options for generating additional revenue in order to fund the post but no appointment will be made until a secure funding source has been identified.

Human Resources:

20. Recruitment to a new post, if agreed, will be made in accordance with the Council's Recruitment and Selection Procedures and Establishment Control processes
21. There are no legal, equalities, crime and disorder, or IT implications.

Property:

22. This strategy should be supported by the completion as soon as possible of a Service Asset Management Plan which will enable the priorities set out and the analysis undertaken to be incorporated into an asset plan which will identify options to close the gap between need and current provision and map a way forward to deliver the changes needed, taking into account cost, funding streams and opportunities.

Risk Management

23. There are no risks of this report as no work that has not been identified in the Sport & Active Leisure service plan will be done and no additional expenditure incurred unless full funding is secured for the football development post. However the risk of not funding the post is that the city may lose some or all of the £5M of investment in pitch facilities that is planned.

Recommendations

24. The Executive Member is asked to agree that:
 - A post of Football Project Officer should be established subject to match funding being identified
 - Officers work with local community and voluntary groups to develop a feasible project for pitch and ancillary facility improvements on the Knavesmire without jeopardising the other uses of the land, and when such a project is developed seek appropriate external partnership funding to deliver it

Reason: To improve the quality of playing pitches available in York.

Contact Details

Author:

Vicky Japes
Senior Sport & Active Leisure Officer
Lifelong Learning & Culture
Tel: 553382

Mick Hutchinson
Senior Sport & Active Leisure Officer
Lifelong Learning & Culture
Tel: 553381

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Charlie Croft
Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)

Report Approved ✓ **Date** 20.11.07.

Specialist Implications Officers:

Richard Hartle
Head of Finance (LCCS)
Ext. 4225

Philip Callow
Head of Asset and Property Management
Ext. 3360

Wards Affected:

All ✓

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annex

Active York's playing pitch chapter from the Sport & Physical Activity Strategy.