

**Report of the Head of Planning and Local Development****Provision of 3<sup>rd</sup> generation sports pitch and upgrade of tennis/netball courts****1 Purpose of report**

To seek permission to submit a capital bid for a new 3rd Generation (3G) football pitch and upgrade to tennis/netball courts at Redwell Leisure Centre.

**2 Executive summary**

This report considers the demand for high grade sports facilities in the borough and recommends a capital investment to upgrade an existing football pitch, with 3G turf and floodlights, along with surface and fencing upgrades to tennis/netball courts within the Redwell Leisure Centre complex.

**3 Appendices**

None

**4 Proposed action:**

- 4.1 The committee is invited to RECOMMEND the submission of a capital bid to support the installation of a new 3G football pitch, flood lights and tennis/netball court upgrades, at Redwell Leisure Centre.**

**5 Background**

- 5.1 The open space, sports and recreation audit and assessment which was reported to this committee on the 7 December 2015 as part of the Local Plan update report, provides the evidence base for the emerging plan for the borough of Wellingborough. This report has identified an overall deficiency in sports provision within the borough, along with a lack of high grade pitches, courts and large scale sports facilities.
- 5.2 The open space, sports and recreation audit and assessment identifies that there has been a rise in demand for boys youth football (35%) since 2007 and a 15% rise for men's adult football. A further increase is predicted over the next 15 years of 15% and 5% respectively, and a 20% increase for mini soccer (under 7s to under 10s mixed).
- 5.3 Current football pitch provision is 1.8 hectares per 1000 population, which is the proposed standard. This is predicted to fall to 1.0 hectare in 1000 by 2031 if no further provisions are made. This equates to 16.19 hectares or the

equivalent of 9 senior pitches or 22 junior size pitches. The open space, sports and recreation audit and assessment identifies a need to provide more pitches and upgrade the pitches that we have.

- 5.4 If pitches are not provided or upgraded in line with national standards, existing usage will decline in favour of out-of-town facilities such as West Glebe and Brooke Weston in Corby and Tresham, Montsaye and the Science Academy in Kettering, which already benefit from 3G and are better placed for future upgrades.
- 5.5 Demand for tennis and netball in Wellingborough is generally in line with county, regional and national levels, but amongst specific groups; 'singles' and 'mid-life adults'(average 13% of population), demand is higher in Wellingborough at 14%.
- 5.6 Provision of courts is meeting the current standard of 0.21 hectares per 1000 population, but the data predicts a decline to 0.18 in the next 15 years (which equates to 3 courts). England Netball has stated that facilities in Wellingborough are very limited and they struggle to find venues which can be used for clubs wanting to expand.

## **6 Discussion**

- 6.1 This report seeks approval to submit a capital scheme for a new 3G surface to be provided at the current second pitch at Redwell Leisure Centre, the installation of flood lighting, and flexible lines to accommodate a variety of different users. In addition to this, funding is also proposed for an upgrade to the existing tennis/netball court which will include a new porous tarmac surface and new fencing.
- 6.2 '3G' is a 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation astro turf football or rugby pitch where the pile (artificial grass 'blades') is supported by a thin base layer of sand and by an infill of rubber crumb. This new style of pitch is designed to offer play quality that replicates natural turf, whilst increasing the level of use. It is the current recommended surface for high quality Football Association (FA) approved pitches.
- 6.3 Wellingborough is currently the only borough in the county to not offer this level of facility. The sports development officer has been in regular close liaison with the county FA regarding the situation and, in spite of significant football foundation investment in the area, Wellingborough continues to be a priority for funding this type of surface. However, match funding would be required to realise this opportunity.
- 6.4 Over a number of years several site visits have been conducted to assess suitability. The majority of football foundation investment for 3G sites is based in educational establishments to maximise payback through usage. However schools and club locations in Wellingborough were visited and were deemed unsuitable for investment at this time for a variety of reasons including: too close to nearby dwellings, lack of finance, lack of security in

terms of length of lease, already having (or bordering) an astro turf pitch multi use surface, and increased costs of development due to no ancillary facilities such as car parking and changing rooms.

- 6.5 The FA considers the Redwell Leisure Centre the most suitable site to accommodate a 3G facility as there is ample car parking and an accessible external change area; it borders one of the largest primary schools; it is set away from existing (though inferior) astro turf pitch provision; and there is existing infrastructure. The support of Football Association funding would enable the council to deliver a superior facility within the town that could serve the wider borough. The fact that it is not a club site allays fears or perceived barriers for other clubs wishing to access the facility.
- 6.6 The tennis/netball courts located at the Redwell Leisure Centre are also in need of an upgrade, and improvements to the courts here will help to address the deficiency of high grade courts available in the borough, and support the overall offer provided by the leisure centre.

## **7 Legal powers**

- 7.1 Under section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 the council has express power to provide a very wide range of sports and recreational facilities and these are not subject to any limitations that would prevent implementation of the project referred to in this report.
- 7.2 However exercise of those powers is subject to any limitations affecting the manner in which the land where the project is to be carried out is held. The council's leisure services provider will also need to be consulted. Those matters will also need to be considered when the terms of any grant funding by the FA are known.

## **8 Financial and value for money implications**

- 8.1 The installation of a 3G pitch and floodlights is estimated to cost £600,000 and a further £75,000 for upgrades to the tennis/netball courts. If successful, a bid to the Football Association will provide a 50% grant towards the installation of the new pitch (£300,000). A grant of £12,000 has been secured from a 'Money for Growth' grant, to support the improvements to the courts.
- 8.2 A 10-12 year maintenance plan will ensure the pitch is appropriately cared for and perpetuates a steady income from hire of the facilities. If football foundation funding was secured, specialist contractors would be required to maintain the pitch in order to comply with the funding agreement and FA standards. Therefore a revenue budget of £6,000 is suggested per year to support the new and upgraded pitches and courts but this would be recovered from income generated.
- 8.3 There is also a requirement from the FA to demonstrate a £20-25k per annum retained revenue budget to enable a suitable upgrade after 10 years. The new pitch is estimated to generate an annual income of around £39,000,

which would cover this sum, the maintenance costs and provide approximately £9,000 to supplement management, staffing and timetabling by Wellingborough Norse or Places for People.

## **9 Risk analysis**

- 9.1 There is a high risk of not meeting BCW sports provision standards if we fail to provide suitable high specification sports facilities. This could limit the opportunities for local people and put Wellingborough at a disadvantage against neighbouring towns where such provision makes them a more attractive place to live, work and invest in. We can reduce this risk by providing high quality sports facilities within the town, which offers access to all.
- 9.2 There is a medium risk that we will fail to secure Football Foundation funding, the consequences of which would mean the project would be undeliverable. However, the Football Foundation has already identified Wellingborough as a high priority for funding.
- 9.3 There is a medium risk that the improvements will fail to generate income targets. This will impact health and well-being targets and jeopardise future investment. Along with Football foundation funding, the project will also be provided with support, guidance and external promotions from the Northamptonshire county FA. The Redwell Leisure Centre is already supported by an established membership, and should be further supported by a robust communications strategy for the 10 year period following the improvements.

## **10 Implications for resources**

Any additional revenue costs created by the improvements and new pitch will be covered by the income generated.

## **11 Implications for stronger and safer communities**

The new pitch will generate renewed interest in using the facilities, local sport and promote healthy lifestyles and tackle obesity issues. The improved quality of the services will also provide a better training environment for aspiring local athletes and clubs, improving opportunities to compete at a higher level.

## **12 Implications for equalities**

An initial equalities impact assessment will be completed if this project receives approval.

## **13 Author and contact officer**

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## **14 Consultees**

Quintin Allen, Northamptonshire Sports Officer  
Bridget Lawrence, Head of Resources  
Julie Thomas, Head of Planning and Local Development  
Liz Elliott, Head of Finance  
Julie O'Connell, Accountant

## **15 Background papers**

The open space, sports and recreation audit and assessment (2015)

