

Subject: Wellesley Recreation Ground

Report to: Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee

Report by: Daniel Hastings- Neighbourhood Manager

Date: 22nd June 2017

SUBJECT MATTER/RECOMMENDATIONS

To consider the current issues and options for the future development and operation of the Wellesley Recreation Ground and approve the development of a detailed business case.

1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Wellesley Recreation Ground was opened in 1888 in order to provide formal facilities for sports in Great Yarmouth. By 1890, local architect, JW Cockrill, had erected a tennis pavilion, ticket office and grandstand on the site. All three buildings are now listed with Grade II status. Cockrill was responsible for a variety of iconic buildings throughout Great Yarmouth and has contributed significantly to the town's distinctive architectural heritage. Furthermore, the grandstand is now considered to be the oldest football stand in Britain and possibly the world. The Recreation Ground is also protected by a 'Fields in Trust' covenant.
- 1.2 Today, the ground is utilised by Great Yarmouth Town Football Club and Great Yarmouth Athletics Club, with community use on the co-located Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and Tennis court. The site has however, been underutilised and appears somewhat neglected, with a recent spate of criminal damage and burglaries to site buildings and ASB across the site. Furthermore, the significance of the ground's heritage, primarily that it features the oldest grandstand in Britain, is largely unknown and underappreciated.
- 1.3 In 2015 Great Yarmouth Borough Council undertook a Sport, Play and

Leisure Strategy to provide an evidence-led approach to the future provision of leisure and sport facilities for the borough's population. The strategy outlined continuing demands in relation to football as the most popular sport in the borough in terms of participation, with 160 teams operating across the district. Pitch provision meets current demands with an over-supply of adult pitches and an under supply of youth and junior pitches. It has been recommended that these could be reconfigured through changes to pitch markings on existing sites. The need for further artificial grass pitches (3G/4G) in the borough was also identified with 1x 3G pitch available at Lynn Grove High School and a subsequent development at Flegg High School last year, leaving a requirement of at least 1 further artificial grass pitch to serve the borough's needs moving forward. A pitch needs assessment was undertaken as part of the Sport and Leisure Strategy and it identified that 52.4% of clubs found access to training facilities difficult. This was noted as being due to poorly lit facilities, weather disruption to grass pitches and pitch availability in evenings. The Wellesley is mostly used for 'casual' users as it isn't suitable for club training in its current format.

- 1.4 The recreation ground was also identified in the sport, play and leisure strategy as a key site that would benefit from a trust model of management, recognising the opportunities for dedicated site management and external funding.

2. CURRENT ISSUES

- 2.1 In recent years, the site has been subject to an increase of antisocial behaviour which has contributed to the deterioration of the ground and its assets. As part of the 'Fields in Trust' status, the Wellesley recreation ground is required to be open and accessible to the public for the majority of each day. The shelter offered by some of the buildings has lent itself to attracting young people who have been known to cause anti-social behaviour and criminal damage on the site, all of which cause operational issues and additional financial costs for the repairs and maintenance. In 2016, hundreds of pounds worth of equipment was stolen from the athletics storage sheds and

the roof of the purpose built 'Bloaters Bar' clubhouse, continues to attract young people to skate on it; often whilst it is in use. The West stand of the ground has also become a 'hangout spot' for street drinkers and although a number of cost efficient security measures have been taken, authorities still continue to receive reports of damage and ASB. An immediate solution with CCTV is being scoped with Great Yarmouth Community Safety Ltd and budget provision has been made in the capital programme for 2017/18.

- 2.2 The repairs and maintenance of the site is delivered through the GYBS contract. Whilst GYBS do not have a planned program of maintenance (PPM) for the site, both the Athletics club and Football club have ongoing concerns with the condition of the pitch and athletics track. This has led to a number of contract management discussions over the maintenance of the site. It is clear that the current fees for usage will not fund the aspirations to improve the site. There are also still some additional financial implications for buildings maintenance for urgent structural repairs which is at separate cost to the council.
- 2.3 Following recent condition surveys undertaken by construction services, it has been identified that the Grandstand, that last had major structural repairs and redecoration undertaken in 2009/10, is now again in poor decorative condition. This building should ideally be cyclically redecorated every 5 years and is now into the 7th year without any redecoration since the major repairs. Further to this, paint is failing and flaking off in numerous locations and as the deterioration is occurring rapidly. There are also brick repairs and repointing required due to weather erosion as the building was constructed with very soft Norfolk red bricks. The brickwork will be ongoing maintenance issue in future years. It is deemed, by construction experts to be a matter to attend to with urgency before rot becomes established once again and major repairs are once again required.
- 2.4 The Grade II listed Tennis pavilion ticket office is redundant and continues to be at risk of loss. It is currently structurally supported internally by scaffolding and fenced off to the public. A previous Big Lottery programme was secured

to deliver a youth led improvement scheme here in 2007, although the programme was not delivered due to the cessation of the associated youth club.

- 2.5 The Bowls Ticket office also of Grade II listing, and a Cockerill building, is currently boarded up and would collapse if the internal supporting scaffold holding up the roof was removed. The timber frame supporting structure has rotted away and is in such bad condition it fails to support the structure. The building has also be subject of antisocial behaviour and had an arson attack in 2016.
- 2.6 The West Stand also has suffered from a lack of redecoration thus leading to rot. Lights have been vandalised beyond repair and building needs re-roofing.
- 2.7 The most recent addition to the site is the public toilets approximately 15 years ago. These are by far in the best condition, although they were recently hit by an ambulance which damaged the roof, fascia's and gutters.
- 2.8 From a leisure management perspective the Wellesley Recreation Ground remains a significant cost to the council. The costs to GYBS far outweigh income received on the site at present, particularly as the pitch needs to be maintained to FA standards to accommodate GYTFC.
- 2.9 The table below details the Wellesley's current operational fiscal deficit for the financial year 15/16, based on estimates provided by GYBS and analysis of leisure income.

Income Vs Expenditure

Income	£ P/A	Expenditure	£ P/A
Athletics	£4,745.65	Grounds Maintenance	£28,300
GYTFC Grass Pitch	£5,777.50	Managers Costs	£1,200
Multi Use Games Area	£12,595.51	Other Costs	£190
'Bloaters' Club House	£2,100	Utility Costs	£7,330
Storage	£135	Repairs and Maintenance	£8,600

'Other' Grass Pitch Fees	£299	Central Overheads	£1,825
		Internal Overheads	£2,120
		Surplus (1%)	£490
Total Income	£ 25,652.66	Total Expenditure	£50,060

3. CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES

- 3.1 Following recent positive conversations with the Football Association (FA), brokered through the sports development officer, a development opportunity has arisen for 3G provision at the ground. After a site visit with officers the FA are keen to support a bid for a 9v9 3G football provision with additional changing facilities and have encouraged an application for funding. They have also asked us to consider in addition, their stadium development fund and Sport England Facilities funding.
- 3.2 The overall cost of the project is estimated at £1 million. At this stage, The FA has indicated that they would require partnership funding of 50% of the overall project costs. However, with a reassuring, strong and sustainable forward plan for the site, based on experience elsewhere the FA have been known to fund in excess of 50% costs. Great Yarmouth is also a target area for intervention, which strengthens the case for FA investment. The opportunity for funding is time limited and Norfolk FA have asked for an early indication from the borough council as to whether a submission will be forthcoming to enable a nominal allocation for 2018/19 planned delivery. Norfolk FA has also asked as to whether Great Yarmouth Sports and Leisure Trust could also be approached about potential match-funding to the scheme.
- 3.3 This unique opportunity is timely for the council, as officers have been working with a stakeholder group, 'The Wellesley Working Group'; made up of club committees, site users and elected members to discuss future options for shaping the offer of the site. There is a real willingness within the group to see

future provision develop to provide new opportunities on the site for sport and recreation.

- 3.4 Other external funding opportunities also need to be explored. These will include the recently launched Sport England programmes. In addition there are further opportunities to secure Heritage Lottery Fund investment on the site given the listed building status it offers. An initial expression of interest to the 'Kicking the Dust' fund was made in November 2016 but was not successful however a number of other opportunities may become available.

4. 3G PITCH MODELS

- 4.1 As a comparison, Barnards Centre Point, Lowestoft, offers a floodlit full size, 3G FIFA approved playing surface. It also offers four team changing rooms, two separate referee changing rooms, snacks and hot and cold drinks. As an outdoor leisure provision it can be used to help forecast potential financial returns for a similar offer from the Wellesley.
- 4.2 Typically, a well-maintained natural turf pitch can offer six to eight playing hours of football a week; however 3G pitches can easily accommodate that volume on a daily basis therefore massively increasing the number of playing opportunities and offering activities at flexible times in-keeping with the demands of the modern day sporting need. The current Wellesley 'MUGA' can only be used by one user at any one time where as a typical 9v9 pitch can offer up to 3 separate simultaneous users. This has clear obvious financial advantages.
- 4.3 A typical weekly offer of available 3G pitch hire would provide 83 ½ hours of availability. The usage can be shared amongst community/ casual users, adult and junior club use as well as educational access from schools in the borough.
- 4.4 Using indicative income projections based on the fees and charges model for Barnards Centre Point, and the pitch demand as identified in the 'pitch needs

analysis' conducted in 2015 we can begin to project a combined income model for the site. The potential financial position could shape up as below.

4.5 Modelled additional income based on additional 3G provision.

Income	£p/a
Athletics	£4745.65
GYTFC Grass Pitch Fees (based on 16/17 Fees and Charges)	£5777.50
'Projected' 9v9 3G Pitch	£27,600
'Bloaters' Club House	£2100
Storage	£299
'Other' Grass Pitch Fees	£135
Total Income	£40,657.15

4.6 In this example we can see an increase of £15,004.49 in annual income of against the current offer. This is a very cautious estimate and does not take into account the potential for increased usage of other parts of the site.

4.7 3G models can also include football development and scholarship programmes which can also generate greater income. This report gives the financial impact against a **basic** offer. It is envisaged that a Soccer Scholarship programme could also be introduced as part of the new Skills Academy vision. It would entail using the 3G facility from Monday – Friday, term time and will be supported by other educational use and additional elements such as walking football.

- 4.8 Coaching schemes could take place as part of an after school programme as well as birthday parties, with the evening sessions dedicated to club training and community use, including leagues Football and Rugby training.
- 4.9 Saturday mornings could be used for junior coaching and development with birthday parties and adult football, possibly a senior match in the afternoons, reverting to parties and community use in the evenings.
- 4.10 Holiday times could provide coaching academies and junior activities, tournament football during competitive close season to supplement the programme.

5. FUTURE SITE MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 Norfolk FA's funding commitment will depend on a sustainable site operating model for the Wellesley. Norfolk FA has suggested that a community-led trust model involving Great Yarmouth Town FC would present some concerns based on the current financial viability of the club. In other parts of Norfolk, the FA has directly managed 3G provision, although they are not proposing to do that for the Wellesley site. They have encouraged the council to consider a future operating model that is managed by a larger trust or organisation, providing the ability for dedicated site management and future development opportunities. There is an option for the Council to vary the existing Sentinel Leisure contract to include the Wellesley site. Central to any site management arrangement will be the involvement and participation of current site users and the wider community.
- 5.2 Following a report provided to the Executive Management Team (EMT) in May, principle endorsement was given, subject to committee approval and a robust business case, to progress the site development options. This included permission to develop alternative match funding solutions and to greater 'scope' future site management options.
- 5.3 Following discussion with the Norfolk FA, the Group Manager for Neighbourhoods and Communities has since written a letter to the Great Yarmouth Sport and Leisure Trust for the consideration of investment in the

site. It was also recognised by EMT that approval of additional capital funding would be required in the future to further progress the sites development.

- 5.4 GYBC can also use the partnering agreement with Pulse Leisure and receive operational model design as part of a feasibility study free of charge. This will give a clearer picture as to the financial implications of the improved offer.

6. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are some risks for the council when considering how it responds to the needs of the site. The issues relating to the longer-term viability of the Wellesley Recreation Ground will bring some reputational risk to the council as the ground is unsustainable and outdated in its current operational format. This will include the implications for the recreation grounds protection through Fields in Trust covenant and the potential loss of grade II listed buildings and historic associations.
- 6.2 There is a continued risk that the present and future demand for pitches will overstretch beyond availability for team and community use.
- 6.3 There is a relationship risk with the council's strategic leisure partner Pulse, if the council uses the Pulse partnering agreement to draw up plans and modelling for the pre-planning phase of the works and then doesn't proceed with site development. Whilst no costs would be incurred at this stage an early indication from the council, based on a business case would help to mitigate any relationship risks.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 On the current operational model the site runs at a £24,407.34 P/A deficit. It is clear that the site is rich in sporting history which needs to be valued and protected. The site needs investment to offer a combination of modern sporting opportunities to clubs and communities in order to deliver against some of the ambitions of the leisure strategy. The current work developed with the Norfolk FA provides a significant opportunity to enable that

investment to happen. A clear business plan on investment options and future operating models for the site needs to be fully explored. There is an opportunity to start developing site plans modelling some of these options through the Pulse partnering agreement for strategic leisure development at no cost to the council.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 The Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee is asked to:

- Consider the content outlined in this report and approve the development of a full business case for the site, to include options around site management arrangements to be considered at a future committee.
- To note that the business case may lead to a proposal to the capital programme for 2018/19 for council match-funding to the scheme.

Area for consideration	Comment
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	Through EMT
Section 151 Officer Consultation:	Through EMT
Existing Council Policies:	Corporate Plan/ Sport, Play and Leisure Strategy
Financial Implications:	Outlined in report
Legal Implications (including human rights):	Outlined in report
Risk Implications:	Outlined in report
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment:	Will need to be considered as proposals develop.
Crime & Disorder:	None identified at this stage.
Every Child Matters:	None identified at this stage- but will impact on play and recreational provision.

