

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

29 March 2022

TITLE:	Birchall Sports Village
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Mark Deaville - Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Sports
CONTACT OFFICER:	Rob Wilks – Principal Officer & Gareth Knapper – Service Development Officer
WARDS INVOLVED:	Leek South

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To seek approval from the Cabinet for capital funds to deliver phase one of a new 'Birchall Sports Village' project in Leek.

2. Recommendations

That the Cabinet:

- Approves the proposal to create a new 'Birchall Sports Village', encompassing two phases as detailed in the report.
- Approves the request for £250,000 to complete phase one of the project.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 Birchall Playing Fields is located on the southern outskirts of Leek, just over 1km from the town centre and has long been the hub for local amateur football and Staffordshire Moorlands Athletics Club. There is a modern pavilion located on site consisting of changing facilities, social area, and an adjoining kitchen. The car park for the site has space for approximately 100 vehicles and was resurfaced and relined in 2019/20. This site is currently managed and maintained by Lex Leisure via the leisure contract with the Council.
- 3.2 The overall purpose of the site, the condition of current facilities and the greater role it could play in helping to deliver the objectives within the Council's Physical Activity and Sport Strategy has been reviewed by officers, from which a new vision to create 'Birchall Sports Village' has been developed.

- 3.3 The new vision includes developing a more diverse range of facilities at the site in addition to making improvements to the existing facilities which will help to encourage greater use throughout weekdays and at weekends, improve accessibility to the grassed areas and, by doing so, create more opportunities for people to be active.
- 3.4 In developing the new vision, officers have used a range of evidence sources and strategic documents alongside conversations with strategic partners and potential funders. The Council has been approached several times by residents to consider how greater use of the site can be encouraged and the new vision brings the feedback from each of these aspects into a clear plan.
- 3.5 Further information regarding the strategic evidence base used to inform this aspect of the new vision can be found in section 7 of this report but includes:
- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Physical Activity and Sport Strategy, 'Towards an Active Staffordshire Moorlands
 - Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and Open Spaces Strategy (2017)
 - Local Football Facilities Plan (LFFP)
- 3.6 It is therefore proposed to initially undertake improvements to the Birchall site as phase one of the project. This will incorporate improvements to the running track and the addition of a new perimeter trail & outdoor fitness equipment. These are detailed further in Section 9 of the report, alongside the justification and benefits of undertaking such works.
- 3.7 In order to progress these phase one works, additional feasibility and procurement work is required to gain a final tendered costs for installing the pathway in the two surfacing options and trim trail equipment. However, based on current working knowledge, initial cost estimates for completing the work are detailed below and approvals are being requested on this basis. Should these amounts prove to be insufficient once further feasibility and procurement work is completed, the project will be reviewed and a suitable way forward agreed.
- Perimeter pathway preferred option: £150,000 (tarmac)
 - Trim trail equipment and distance markers: £60,000
- 3.8 Whilst phase one is being progressed, further work to develop plans for phase two, which is proposed and detailed in Section 10, will continue, including conversations with local stakeholders and partners such as Staffordshire FA, the Football Foundation, existing users, prospective users, and Lex Leisure.
- 3.9 Once plans for phase 2 have been developed, a further report will be brought back to Cabinet detailing the findings of the work and any recommendations for consideration.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

4.1 This project delivers against Aim 1 of the SMDC Corporate Plan: To help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work, and specifically the objective of developing and implement an outdoor leisure facilities improvement plan focussed around the “sports village” concept.

5. **Alternative Options**

5.1 There are two options available to the council:

1. To approve for the creation of a new 'Birchall Sports Village' as detailed in the report and approve the request for £250,000 to complete phase one of the project as detailed in the report **(Recommended)**.

2. To not approve plans to develop the Birchall Sports Village as proposed in the report **(Not Recommended)**.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

Parks and open spaces provide a range of opportunities for people of all ages to engage in positive activities. Outdoor sports facilities can provide an outlet for young people and help deter them from antisocial behaviour, therefore it is important these facilities are provided and kept in a good condition.

6.2 Workforce

None

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

An EIA has been completed in accordance with the Council's policy.

6.4 Financial Considerations

Running track:

- Capital cost: £40,000
- Annual revenue implications: £1,000 for enhanced maintenance regimes provided by Glendale.

Perimeter running, walking and exercise circuit:

- Capital cost implication: £150,000 (tarmac) (estimate)
- Capital cost: Outdoor fitness equipment - £60,000 (estimate)

These items were not included in the recent capital programme approved alongside the budget. If the report is approved then the additional costs will be incorporated as an authorised revision and

included in the quarterly financial monitoring reports.

6.5 Legal

There are no specific legal considerations at this stage.

6.6 Climate Change

There are no specific climate change considerations at this stage.

6.7 Consultation

None

6.8 Risk Assessment

Appropriate assessment will be made as per each project within the strategy

Mark Trillo

Executive Director (Governance & Commissioning)

Web Links and

Background Papers

Physical Activity and Sport Strategy: [Towards an Active Staffordshire Moorlands](#)

Playing Pitch Strategy:

https://www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/media/2847/Staffordshire-Moorlands-Playing-Pitch-Strategy-and-Action-Plan-2017/pdf/Playing_Pitch_Strategy_and_Action_Plan_2017_-_Final.pdf

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Football Facilities Plan:

<https://localplans.footballfoundation.org.uk/local-authorities-index/staffordshire-moorlands/staffordshire-moorlands-executive-summary/>

Contact details

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7. Detail

7.1 Birchall Playing Fields is located on the southern outskirts of Leek, just over 1km from the town centre. The site has long been the hub for local amateur football for Leek and the surrounding area, currently housing thirteen pitches, with a mix of senior and junior sizes. A modern pavilion is also located on site which contains four separate changing rooms, two officials' rooms, showers, toilets, and a central social area with adjoining kitchen. There is a large car park which has space for just over 100 vehicles and was resurfaced and relined in 2019/20. This site is currently managed and maintained by Lex Leisure via the leisure contract with the council.

- 7.2 The football pitches are well used by local amateur teams of all ages throughout the main season. In the off-season the site still has a good level of usage with recreational football and ad-hoc training sessions taking place, although the goals are removed to allow summer renovation works to take place. In the current season (2021/22) there are 27 teams that have direct hire agreements in place to use the pitches either for matches or training sessions.
- 7.3 The site is also the location of the only running track in the Staffordshire Moorlands which was first developed in approximately 1976. The track is an old-fashioned red gravel surface, which measures 440 yards in length (rather than metres) and has an unusual oval shape with longer straights and tighter bends in comparison to modern running tracks. The track is the home for Staffordshire Moorlands Athletics Club, and it is also used informally by local coaches and the wider public for recreational training/fitness.
- 7.4 The site is also a popular location for informal recreation, particularly walking, dog walking, jogging and the site was location of the Leek Show until 2019.
- 7.5 The car park which serves the facility accommodates approximately 100 vehicles and has recently been resurfaced and re-marked. At peak times the demand for car parking spaces can outstretch the availability. This is rare and is generally limited to Sunday mornings, with vehicles parking along the roadside adjacent to the site in the event that the car park becomes full.

Evidence base

- 7.6 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Physical Activity and Sport Strategy, 'Towards an Active Staffordshire Moorlands' highlights how the Council and its partners will work together to enable more people to live active lives. Facilities play a key role in enabling activity and, as such, Birchall is a key asset to the Council, Leek, and the surrounding area.
- 7.7 In order to inform decision making and resource allocation, we use several different strategies/plans to help guide and direct where focus should be directed. The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) was adopted in 2017 and broadly assesses the district's overall provision and the quality of facilities across the district. The site is classed as a "Key Site" within the district, and it is recommended that facilities are "protected and enhanced". The quality of playing pitches were classed as "Standard" with some pitches found to be overplayed and therefore at greater risk of decreasing the quality. Recommendations are for the football pitches to be sustained and where possible improved.
- 7.9 The running track was assessed as being of "poor quality", in particular the report noted areas of the track were overgrown with grass and weeds, in addition to having no clearly marked out lanes. The report recommends the track should be "retained and improved" and further suggests resurfacing of the track should be considered to accommodate demand or that enhanced maintenance regimes should be considered if the demand to resurface the track with a different surface is not feasible.

- 7.10 Another document which is important to reference is the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Football Facilities Plan (LFFP). This document was produced in 2018 by the Football Foundation, Staffordshire County Football Association and SMDC working together to highlight the priorities required to improve grass roots football across the district.

The plan focuses on four main areas of development;

- 3G artificial turf pitches
- Improved grass pitches
- Changing rooms, pavilion buildings and clubhouses
- Small-sided (informal) recreation football

- 7.11 Any projects that the Council wishes to bring forward should be referenced within this plan to have any chance of accessing partnership funding from the Football Foundation. Birchall Playing Fields is not currently included, however, the document is due to be revised early in 2022 and will present an opportunity to include any football related improvements required at the site.

8. Vision

- 8.1 Our vision therefore is to create 'Birchall Sports Village' which incorporates a diverse range of activities, improved facilities, greater accessibility and, by doing so, creating more opportunities for people to be active.

- 8.2 It is proposed that this new vision to create Birchall Sports Village be delivered in two phases which are set out below.

9. Proposed Improvement Works

Phase 1 Improvements: Running track, perimeter trail and outdoor fitness equipment

- 9.1 As stated, the running track is in poor condition and over the last 18 months, despite some additional maintenance, the track has substantial moss and grass coverage as well as some uneven areas. The inside and outer edges of the track have been lost, gradually eroding into the grass over a period of time, meaning that a programme of refurbishment together with an enhanced maintenance programme is required.

- 9.2 It is recommended that an appropriate refurbishment scheme is agreed with the existing grounds maintenance contractor for the following works;

- Re-establish the inside and outside curb to the track
- Resurface the track using current material
- Install an access pathway to connect the car park to the track area.
- Provide an enhanced maintenance regime

- 9.3 The anticipated capital cost to undertake this work is circa £40,000 with an uplift of between £500-£1,000 per year required for the completion of an enhanced programme of maintenance on site, to ensure the improvements are sustained as well as possible in the future. The maintenance regime would be

monitored regularly to ensure levels were sufficient to maintain the required standards.

- 9.4 The addition of a circular pathway, preferably constructed of tarmac, around the perimeter of the site would promote walking, jogging all year round, whilst also encouraging dog walkers to exercise their pets away from the playing pitches and running track.
- 9.5 It is proposed that the pathway is further enhanced with in inclusion of distance markers and trim trail outdoor fitness equipment at appropriate location/s to attract a wider use and help the Council to deliver aspirations within the Physical Activity and Sport Strategy.
- 9.6 In order to progress this aspect further, additional feasibility and procurement work is required to gain a final tendered costs for installing the pathway in the two surfacing options and trim trail equipment. However, based on current working knowledge, initial cost estimates for completing the work are detailed below and approvals are being requested on this basis. Should these amounts prove to be insufficient once further feasibility and procurement work is completed the project will be reviewed and a suitable way forwards agreed:
- Perimeter pathway preferred option; £150,000 (tarmac)
 - Trim trail equipment and distance markers: £60,000
- 9.7 Use of a tarmac surface for the perimeter pathway would limit the level of ongoing maintenance required in comparison to other surfaces such as compressed gravel. Health and safety inspections of the outdoor fitness equipment would be required, and it is proposed this would be undertaken by AES, as a result there may need to be a small increase to the management fee payable to AES annually.

10. Phase 2: Playing pitch and ancillary facilities improvements

- 10.1 Work has also begun to review the needs of football at the site, including grass pitch provision and ancillary facilities, most notably the pavilion building. Officers believe there is further scope to develop and improve the facilities and usage and wish to involve local stakeholders and partners including existing users, prospective users, Staffordshire FA, Football Foundation and Lex Leisure in the approach to ensure that local needs in any possible new opportunities to enhance the site and increase usage are considered.
- 10.2 A further report detailing the findings of this review, with a summary of any investment proposals with associated cost estimates, will be provided to the Cabinet for consideration in due course.