

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Playing Pitch Strategy Approach</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 26 January 2023
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure - Ian Shenton

**PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

To seek approval to cease further work at Maiden Erlegh at this stage and reassess the needs of the Earley and Lower Earley area within the strategic review of playing pitches, which will inform optimal pitch locations incorporating a 3G pitch development plan going forward across the Borough.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive approves the following:

To cease any further work at this stage at Maiden Erlegh School and await the outcome of the strategic review of playing pitches incorporating a 3G pitch development plan which will inform optimal pitch locations going forward across the Borough.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following Executive approval in July 2022 for the proposed 3G pitch at Maiden Erlegh School, supporting the need for additional 3G sites across the Borough, consultation identified several difficulties with the site, while confirming the demand for such facilities. Simultaneously, costs escalated, and the council's financial situation worsened, so that 3G provision in the Earley and Lower Earley area needed to be reassessed. However, it is believed that reassessment will be more effective as part of a new Borough-wide Playing Pitch Strategy.

Therefore, it is requested that the existing proposal be ceased at this stage, and that the needs of the Earley and Lower Earley area be incorporated in the Playing Pitch Strategy. We will continue working with the Football Foundation for any alternative site that may well emerge following the strategic review/development plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

Following the outcome of the Football Foundation Local Football plan, which identified the need for additional 3G sites across the Borough, agreement was given at the July 2022 Executive for a new proposed 3G pitch to be progressed at Maiden Erlegh School, subject to public consultation.

The aim of the Football Foundation Local Football plan was to set out a clear demand need in 3G pitch provision, as the Wokingham locality has over 540 football teams creating a need for additional training venues including 3G provision. The initial focus was aimed at satisfying demand in the Earley and Lower Earley area.

With some pre-application work already done, the full public consultation took place in September 2022 and identified several difficulties with the site. Additionally, revised financials from the Football Foundation show an increase of more than 10% in the cost of construction, against the backdrop of the council's worsening financial situation. As a result, there is a need to reassess the current proposal for 3G provision in the Earley and Lower Earley area as the recognised demand remains unfulfilled.

## **BUSINESS CASE**

Arising from the need to reassess the current proposal, it has been identified that a Borough-wide strategic development plan (Playing Pitch Strategy) incorporating 3G pitch provision should be prepared. Rather than a piecemeal approach, this will create a clear plan that can be utilised for future development proposals, incorporating the following key areas:

- Revised Playing Pitch Strategy (Due Summer 2023). This will inform optimal pitch locations going forward across the Borough.
- Further Stakeholder engagement. This will include working with the Equality forum and Youth council to ensure a wider support and engagement focus.
- Review of existing sites in line with proposed future strategic development plan (Playing Pitch Strategy) incorporating 3G Pitches across the borough.
- Review of funding opportunities and any additional financial support for future provisions.
- A full and detailed financial plan identifying funding sources and probable cost implications for the council of each proposed new 3G pitch.
- Key timelines and outcomes each new 3G pitch will deliver against including wider community outcomes.

Once the Playing Pitch Strategy is completed a full evaluation will take place gauging all 3G pitch provision needs. This will include demand and costs associated with each proposed new 3G pitch project that may emerge from the wider Playing Pitch Strategy.

A key element of this plan (Playing Pitch Strategy) will be communication with football teams and the wider sporting community, where appropriate, to provide updates on developments and take on board any emerging needs within the groups.

A key officer working group is in place to input and shape future plans, as required.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	(£800k)	Yes - £500k grant (subject to football foundation approval), £300k borrowing	Capital
<b>Financials as per July 22 Executive Paper.</b>	Net Nil		Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Net Nil	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Net Nil	Yes	Revenue

### **Other Financial Information**

The above financial calculations are those presented to Executive in July 2022, which stated that the estimated annual surplus would be utilised to provide a Sinking Fund for pitch replacement. The costs of implementation are likely to have increased over time.

### **Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation**

A clear comms will need to be developed with key stakeholders and residents and attention to the public consultation that took place in September.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

n/a

***Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030***

n/a.

### **Reasons for considering the report in Part 2**

n/a

### **List of Background Papers**

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