

## **CABINET**

**22 SEPTEMBER 2020**

### **NEW 3G FLOODLIT FOOTBALL ARTIFICIAL TURF PITCH AND CHANGING PAVILION AT WATLING STREET PLAYING FIELDS**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Howard Doe, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services  
Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive  
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#### Summary

To seek Cabinet approval for the construction of a new floodlit football artificial turf pitch and associated changing pavilion at Watling Street playing fields, and to recommend the addition of £1,319,976 to the Council's capital programme to enable the project to be undertaken.

#### 1. Budget and policy framework

1.1. The provision of leisure services is a matter for Cabinet. Additions to the Capital Programme are a decision for full Council. This report is asking Cabinet to recommend that Council approves an addition of £1,319,976 to the Capital Programme to enable development of a floodlit football artificial turf pitch and associated changing rooms at Watling Street playing fields in Gillingham.

This is to be funded from various sources

- Football Foundation £884,976
- Anchorians Football Club £35,000
- Medway Council Match £400,000

1.2. Medway has an aspiration to become a Child-Friendly City, putting our young people at the heart of everything we do. Medway's journey will be shaped by our children and young people, from early years through to secondary age, and this investment at Watling Street playing fields will support that agenda by providing outstanding, modern football facilities for our young.

- 1.3. This development aligns with the objectives of the Medway Council Plan – supporting Medway people to realise their potential – healthy and active communities
- 1.4. The proposal also aligns with the Development Plan – health and communities – which states the plan aims to: “improve the quality of life for Medway’s residents, meeting their needs for services and providing the opportunities that support people in living healthy and fulfilling lives.”

## 2. Background

- 2.1. The Football Foundation is the Premier League, Football Association and Government charity that helps communities across England improve local football facilities.
- 2.2. Its stated aim is to invest in improvements that make facilities more welcoming, well-maintained and safe for anyone who wants to play, coach, support or socialise within them.
- 2.3. The Football Foundation is particularly keen to develop artificial turf pitches, which has supported the biggest single increase to participation of any form of football facility investment they have undertaken. The impact at grassroots level is significant, particularly among under-represented groups including women and girls, people with a disability and BAME communities.
- 2.4. The Football Foundation has identified Medway as a priority area for investment; since 2017 Medway Council has been exploring a potential funding partnership with the Football Foundation.
- 2.5. The Medway Playing Pitch Strategy and the FA Local Football Facility Plan has identified a deficit of five artificial football pitches to meet current demand for training and matchplay for junior and adult football teams in Medway.
- 2.6. The Football Foundation is keen to financially support an initial single-site development at Watling Street playing fields, with potential funding for a further single site and a multi-site hub in future years.
- 2.7. The Football Foundation has awarded Medway a grant of £884,976 for the initial single-site pitch development at Watling Street Playing Fields. The Football Foundation normally limits single-site development funding to a maximum grant of £750,000. However, a higher offer has been made as Medway is a priority area for investment and because of the partnership with Anchorians FC, one of the largest community grassroots football clubs in the country which is based at Watling Street playing fields. Anchorians are a well-established community club and were named Charter Standard Club of the Year in 2018 from more than 3,000 grass roots clubs nationally.
- 2.8. The grant from the Football Foundation is subject to match funding of £400,000 from Medway Council. A further £35,000 has been committed by Anchorians Football Club.

- 2.9. The total project costs for the construction of the artificial pitch and changing pavilion, including professional fees is £1,319,976.
- 2.10. Cost-certainty has been achieved through tendering the construction of the artificial pitch and the changing pavilion. These tenders have been assessed by Procurement Board and awarded, subject to Cabinet and Council approval of the project.

### 3. Options

- 3.1 The range of options considered include:
- Option 1: Seek to develop the artificial football pitch and changing pavilion at Watling Street playing fields, in line with the funding agreement with the Football Foundation.
  - Option 2: Seek to develop the similar facilities elsewhere in Medway.
  - Option 3: Decline the grant offer and do not proceed with the project.
- 3.2 Option 1 will create a new full size floodlit 3G artificial Football Turf Pitch with changing pavilion at Watling Street Playing Fields, Gillingham (Anchorians Sports Ground). The project will receive capital funding from the Football Foundation and Anchorians Football Club and will meet an identified need for improved football facilities of benefit particularly to clubs in the east of Medway.
- 3.3 Option 2 could potentially create a new full size floodlit 3G artificial Football Turf Pitch with changing pavilion at an alternative, unspecified location in Medway. However, it is not known whether this would attract funding from the Football Foundation and thus may jeopardise the opportunity for a new facility in the east of Medway.
- 3.4 Option 3 is not considered appropriate. Advice is that declining the grant from the Football Foundation at this time will subsequently result in Medway remaining with a deficit of artificial football pitches to meet playing demand and any future funding support from The Football Foundation will prove very unlikely. Thus the benefits set out in paragraph 4.2 below will not be realised.

### 4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 Having considered the options above as outlined, it is recommended Members approve Option 1. This includes:
- Building a new full-size floodlit artificial football pitch with associated changing pavilion at Watling Street Playing Fields, Gillingham.
  - The artificial football pitch will replace an existing Council grass pitch at the same site, and the changing pavilion will be located on an adjoining vacant greenspace.
  - Medway Sport Leisure, Tourism and Heritage service will be responsible for the management of the new facility, including bookings, income and expenditure.

- Anchorians FC are a confirmed partner in the project and will contribute £35,000 to the capital scheme and support with onsite management services including cleaning, weekly pitch maintenance and staffing. This will save the Council circa £10,000pa

- 4.2 The project will deliver a high-quality facility which
- Supports skill development in young players.
  - Provides excellent year-round playing and training conditions for juniors and adults for clubs throughout Medway
  - Increases opportunities to access community football through recreational league and small-sided game formats.
  - Provides greater opportunities for inclusivity including girls, disability, veterans and walking football.
- 4.3 A Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

## 5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Capital funding	There is insufficient capital funding to deliver the project	The capital works have been tendered to provide cost certainty. The Football Foundation has provided written confirmation of its grant contribution	E2
Sustainability	The new facility fails to generate sufficient revenue to ensure ongoing viability	A 10-year revenue projection has been prepared and aligns with revenue achieved at other such facilities nationwide. Partnership with Anchorians provides a known tenant providing regular income	D3
Covid19	Ongoing social distancing and safety measures have prolonged impact on facility usage	Construction will be undertaken while social distancing measures are in place with	D2

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		completion in time for the 2021/22 football season	
Planning	Planning permission is not granted	Pre-planning consultation was undertaken with the planning department. Formal planning application has been submitted and questions raised have been addressed	D2

## 6. Consultation

- 6.1 Meetings were held with representatives from Medway football leagues:
- Medway Messenger Youth League (MMYL), who have 35 clubs and 300+ affiliated teams attached to their league.
  - Rochester & District Men's Football League (R&D), 55 clubs and 59 affiliated teams.
  - Medway Messenger Sunday Men's Football League (MMSFL), 51 clubs and 58 affiliated teams.
  - Kent Girls and Ladies Football league with 4 local clubs and 23 teams between them.
- 6.2 The Kent FA were also consulted and fully support the bid made to the Football Foundation
- 6.3 Invitations for Expressions of Interest to use the proposed facility were also sent out to:
- 60+ Medway primary and secondary schools
  - Mid Kent College and University of Kent
  - Medway affiliated football teams
  - Gillingham FC for their first team training, academies and community trust activities
  - Medway District Youth Football
  - Kent FA for recreational football sessions and coaching courses
  - Other sports governing bodies including Rugby Union and Rugby League

Responses have been extremely positive and a potential usage plan has already been developed based on the responses from Anchorians FC, other adult and youth teams, Gillingham FC, Medway District Youth Football and the Kent FA.

## 7. Climate Change implications

- 7.1 In line with the Council's climate change aspirations, opportunities to minimize the carbon footprint of the development will be explored. This includes seeking planning permission to keep spoil on site to negate the need for excess journeys.

## 8. Financial implications

- 8.1 The Total Cost of the work is £1,319,976 which is to be funded by a Grant of £884,976 from the Football foundation, £35,000 from Anchorians Football Club with the remaining £400,000 Match funding from Medway Council being funded from Prudential borrowing.
- 8.2 The report seeks cabinet approval for the Medway Council match of £400,000 to be funded from Prudential Borrowing. This will be paid back over 10 Years which given the current interest rates gives an annual repayment of circa £46,000 per year.
- 8.3 The £46,000 annual repayment of the Council's £400,000 capital funding has been included in the ten-year revenue and expenditure forecast for the facility.
- 8.4 Construction of the artificial football pitch and changing pavilion have been tendered to provide greater cost-certainty. Tenders have been assessed and awarded via Medway Council's Procurement Board, subject to Cabinet approval of the project and Council approval of the capital match-funding.

## 9. Legal implications

- 9.1 Subject to Cabinet and Council approval of the project and associated match-funding, the Council's financial procedure rules have been followed supported by the Category Management team in the appointment of contractors to complete the various elements of works proposed.

## 10 Recommendations

- 10.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the development of a new full size 3G artificial floodlit football turf pitch and associated changing pavilion at Watling Street playing fields, as set out as Option 1 in Section 4 of the report.
- 10.2 Cabinet is asked to recommend Full Council to approve the addition to the Capital programme of £1,319,976 for the development of a new full Size 3G artificial football turf pitch and associated changing pavilion at Watling Street playing fields, as set out in Section 4 of the report.
- 10.3 Cabinet is asked to recommend Full Council to approve Medway Council's match funding of £400,000 to be funded from Prudential Borrowing.

## 11. Suggested reasons for decision(s)

- 11.1 The capital sum requested will enable the development of a floodlit artificial football pitch, helping to address an identified need in Medway as expressed in the Medway Playing Pitch Strategy. Developing the project in partnership with the Football Foundation and an established local community football club will help create opportunities for future partnership investment in Medway.

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### Appendices

Appendix 1 - Diversity Impact Assessment

### Background papers

None