BRIEFING PAPER FOR SADDLEWORTH & LEES DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP

Churchill Playing Fields

29th September 2011

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Purpose of Paper
To update the District Partnership on the progress of the proposed improvements to Churchill Playing Fields.

Recommendations
That the District Partnership note the information presented.
1. **Introduction and background**

1.1 Churchill Playing Fields has poor drainage and regularly floods, causing events and sporting activities to be cancelled. Saddleworth and Lees District Partnership’s aspiration for Churchill Playing Fields is “To improve and enhance this leisure and recreation facility for the benefit of all the community”.

1.2 Resolving the drainage issues is fundamental to Churchill continuing to be fit for purpose for sport and recreation in the future. This is identified as a priority in both the Saddleworth and Lees District Plan, and the Saddleworth Parish Plan.

1.3 Consultation and a report into the drainage issues on Churchill Playing Fields were undertaken by Oldham Community Leisure Ltd in 2008. The issue was then revisited in September 2009, when the Saddleworth & Lees District Partnership asked for a report on Churchill playing fields following the cancellation of community events and matches which resulted in much public concern. This report was received in February 2010 and as a result a working group was set up to progress a solution to the issues being faced at the site.

1.4 A specialist report into various drainage options was provided by PSD (NW) Ltd, who are experts in drainage and sports field solutions, in January 2011. This report confirmed that significant works are needed but the drainage issues can be solved.

1.5 The report from PSD, further site surveys, and the feedback from a series of consultation meetings with stakeholders, the general public and national sporting bodies (RFL, FA and UK Athletics), have been used by the working group to develop:

   a) An overall vision for the site based on a phased approach covering improvements to drainage, changing rooms, tennis courts and informal recreation facilities (as funding permits), and

   b) A ‘Phase 1’ scheme for the improvement of the drainage and site layout, the key objectives of which are to:

      o Reduce the occurrence of flooding on the site
      o Reduce the number of cancelled events and sports matches arising from poor surface conditions
      o Meet the current and future demands of the site for sports and events booking.
1.6 The delivery of phase 1 will involve:

i) A comprehensive drainage scheme involving the clearance of the existing culvert under the site, installation of slit and lateral drains, sand amelioration and levelling, which would result in the site being unavailable for use by anyone for around 9 months, whilst the new grass surface is established.

ii) Removing the running track to enable the drainage works to take place across the whole site, maximising the drained grass playing surface available afterwards. Making it possible to increase the number of adult pitches from 3 to 4 (to sustainably meet current levels of use) and use the grass area flexibly for a range of activities that support the development needs of the local sports clubs. (for example mini soccer tournaments, tag rugby festivals, multi sport school holiday sessions)

b) Ensuring that the benefits arising from these physical works are sustained through careful management of the site, namely by establishing a new management structure and protocols for the use of the site by event organisers and sports clubs.

1.7 This proposal was consulted on with key stakeholders (sports clubs and event organisers who book Churchill Playing Fields) in February 2011 and the general public in March 2011.

1.8 The feedback from all the consultation meetings and responses received resulted in several changes to the plans. At the meeting of the Saddleworth and Lees District Partnership on Thursday 17 March 2011 the following phased approach to improvements at Churchill Playing fields was agreed as the recommended course of action to meet the objectives for the site (set out in paragraph 1.5 above):

Phase 1 (see Appendix 1 for the site layout)
- Removal of running track
- Sand amelioration, drainage slits, site levelling across the whole of the site
- Increase in adult sports pitches from 3 to 4, plus creation of 1 junior pitch and a training area
- Relocation of long jump to another location within the site
- Creation of new hard standing area at the southern end near the entrance to the site from Wellington Road. To provide space for event vehicles, staging etc.
- Provision of a 100m sprint track
- A grass track marked out on the site during the summer months
- Retention of existing perimeter footpath and installation of distance markers

Phase 2/3 (subject to funding and further consultation)
- Improvements to changing rooms
- Upgrade tennis/netball courts
- Installation of trim trail
1.9 In addition to these amendments, Oldham Council agreed with OCLL for Saddleworth Runners to be offered free use of the Radcliffe track for a minimum of 2 years.

1.15 The revised scheme was then worked up into bids to the Football Foundation for £180,000 and the Rugby Football League Association for £50,000. Supported by a package of £155,000 secured by the Council to act as match funding, and contribute to the overall scheme costs. The match funding package is made up of £50,000 from the Saddleworth & Lees District Partnership (EDRS 10090152) and Section 106 funding. The section 106 funding having been previously allocated to the scheme (recorded on the modern gov system at http://decisionrecording.oldham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=370)

2. Current Position

2.1 Funding

2.1.1 Local clubs who currently use Churchill Playing Fields and who will continue to do so following the improvement works have pledged to raise money to contribute to the scheme. Letters of financial support have been received from 3D Dynamo’s, Diggle FC, Uppermill FC and Saddleworth Rangers along with Saddleworth Round Table as identified in the table below.

2.2.2 Following the submission of the bids to the Football Foundation and the Rugby Football League Association, the Council has had offers for the full amounts applied for. These offers and the terms and conditions have been assessed and a report to accept the grant offers prepared. This gives an overall funding package as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding source</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DB 228 - Former Andrew Mill, Chew Valley Road, Greenfield (Rimmons Close) (PA/50955) – Section 106</td>
<td>£0</td>
<td>£78,255.77</td>
<td>£78,255.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DB 260 - The Old Police Station, Buckley Street, Uppermill (PA/41998) - Section 106</td>
<td>£0</td>
<td>£9,734.28</td>
<td>£9,734.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DB 155 - Village Manor, High Street, Uppermill (PA/45361) - Section 106</td>
<td>£0</td>
<td>£17,601.79</td>
<td>£17,601.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddleworth &amp; Lees District Partnership (EDRS 10090152)</td>
<td>£0</td>
<td>£50,000</td>
<td>£50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddleworth Round Table</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
<td>£10,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football Foundation</td>
<td>£0</td>
<td>£180,000</td>
<td>£180,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugby Football League</td>
<td>£50,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>£50,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising by local clubs</td>
<td>£16,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>£16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL (£)</strong></td>
<td><strong>£71,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>£340,591</strong></td>
<td><strong>£411,591</strong></td>
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</table>
2.1.2 Following feedback from the Football Foundation during their technical assessment of the bid, it was identified that basic improvements to the changing rooms are needed to comply with their policies regarding investment in pitch drainage. Therefore, the offer letter of £180,000 from the Football Foundation allows for additional works beyond those to the playing fields in order to deliver some intermediate improvements to the changing rooms, before more significant improvements can be carried out under phase 2 which will require further funding.

2.1.3 The tender process has now been completed and the preferred tenderer identified. The tender is subject to acceptance by Cabinet due to the high value of the works. Once the tender costs are added to the fees associated with the scheme and the additional intermediate works required in the changing rooms, the total project cost is £411,591.

2.3 Timescales

2.3.1 Drainage and pitch improvement works ideally need to be undertaken during the drier/warmer months of early spring and into the summer. Due to the delay in the evaluation of the bid by the Football Foundation and subsequent delay to the proposed start date to September 2011 at the earliest, a revised start date of March 2012 was set. This means that work will take place over Spring/Summer 2012, in order to minimise the risk from inclement weather and ensure effective implementation. It also takes account of the need for the Rugby Football League funding to be drawn down during the current financial year, as failure to do so could result in the loss of this funding.

2.3.2 The delay should not however impact on the date that Churchill Playing Fields will be back in use for sports clubs and the public, as it expected that the pitches will be established by September/October 2012. (This has always been the anticipated date that the site will be back in use). The start date has been put back 6 months; therefore before the works take place, the clubs who use Churchill will get most of the 2011/2012 season on Churchill if they still wish to use the site.

2.4 Communication and Engagement

Since the last District Partnership meeting on the 17th March there has been ongoing communication and engagement with the following groups

2.4.1 Saddleworth Runners
Ongoing dialogue with Saddleworth Runners has taken place regarding their use of the site and the changing timeframe for the planned works. They have confirmed that Churchill is used for road and fell running warm-ups, occasional speed work and youth training sessions currently taking place on the athletics track on Thursday evenings during the summer months. Discussions are taking place with them regarding the level of the fees to be paid, following their commitment to contributing towards their use of the site.

2.4.2 Churchill Playing Fields Action Group (CPFAG)
An open letter from CPFAG was posted on the Saddleworth News website in August which suggested an alternative layout could be used whilst
retaining the running track. The council has considered this proposal and concluded that the alternative layout is not suitable for a number of reasons and posted a response to this effect on the website. (Appendix 2). A further revised layout has recently been sent to the Council by CPFAG. This has also been considered by the Council and still doesn’t overcome the reasons why the previous revised layout was not suitable in the first instance. (See Appendix 3)

2.4.3 The council also checked with the Football Association as to whether a revised layout including that submitted by CPFAG would be an acceptable alternative to the council’s approved plan. We were advised that any variation would have to be reassessed by the Football Foundation technical advisors. They also stated that:

“The cost of the scheme is expensive for this type of project as a result of the inherent technical difficulties on the site. To retain the track and drain the existing grass pitches would not provide us with the required outputs identified above”.

Therefore the submission to the Football Foundation of an alternative layout which included the running track would significantly reduce the amount of funding they would be likely to contribute to the scheme.

2.4.4 Saddleworth Football Forum and Saddleworth Rangers

Officers attended a meeting of the Saddleworth Football Forum on 21 July 2011 to advise the clubs playing on Churchill about the delay in the funding decision making process and the subsequent delay to the start of the project. The changes to the planned timeframes were also communicated directly to Saddleworth Rangers. This ensured that those clubs who wished to start the season on Churchill were able to and were aware of the delay. Clubs were also advised of the increased charges to Churchill as a result of the improvements and that the mechanism for clubs to book pitches was not changing.

2.4.5 Event Organisers

The delayed start to the start of the planned works has also been communicated to all key event organisers, including the Saddleworth Roundtable (enabling the site to be used for the Beer Walk as usual in 2011), Yanks are Back in Saddleworth (enabling Churchill to be used as a camping venue in 2011) and Saddleworth Village Olympics group who were offered a chance to move this year’s event back to Churchill but decided to continue with holding it at Saddleworth School.

2.4.6 Other correspondence

The Council has also received more letters of support from the project; including further letters from local sports clubs and also Saddleworth Olympics. The council has also responded to a small number of direct enquiries regarding the scheme from local residents and stakeholders.

3. Future Management

3.1 Once the improvement works have been carried out, the pitches at Churchill playing fields will be categorised as grade A as opposed to grade C as at present. This will involve an increase in the costs of hiring the pitches as set out in the Council’s approved Fees and Charges report. (Appendix 4)
3.2 In order to protect the significant investment to be made in Churchill, operational and management arrangements for the site will need to be reviewed and new protocols established. It is envisaged that this will involve setting up a local management group that includes stakeholders from local sporting communities e.g. running/athletics, football and rugby, along with event organisers. As these proposals are developed further reports will be submitted to the District Partnership for their input.

4. Recommendation

That the District Partnership note the information presented.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Planned Layout and rationale for Churchill Playing Fields
Appendix 2 – Issues with Alternative layout (Churchill Plan B)
Appendix 3 – Issues with Alternative layout (Churchill Plan B revised)
Appendix 4 – Fees and Charges (outdoor facilities)