

Report to CHARITY COMMITTEE

Clayton Playing Fields

Portfolio Holder:

Cllr Arooj Shah, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Growth
Cllr Elaine Taylor, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods

Officer Contact: Emma Barton – Deputy Chief Executive (Place)

Report Author(s):

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Date: 23 June 2025

Reason for Decision

To update members on activities at Clayton Playing Fields to safeguard, improve and utilise the asset for community benefit and to seek committee endorsement for the recommendations set out in this report in order to inform a formal decision by the relevant portfolio holder.

Recommendations

Charity Committee Members are requested to approve:

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The asset comprises 9.85 hectares of playing fields and open recreation space, with a supporting car park. The asset is a charitable asset and is owned freehold by the Council via the Charity Committee.
- 1.2 There is a cabin on-site providing changing facilities to support the use of the playing fields. The while asset is designated as a Town Green.
- 1.3 Boundary Park neighbours the site together with Little Wembley training ground (a designated Asset of Community Value (18 October 2021)).
- 1.4 The report is to update Members on recent activities / requests which could safeguard, improve and / or utilise the playing fields for the covenanted community use.
- 1.5 There are no proposals to change the ownership of the land or its status as an important community asset.

2.0 Activities for Committee Information and Consideration

2.1 Tree Planting

- 2.1.1 Concerns have been raised by local residents and elected members about tree planting on Clayton Playfield Fields.
- 2.1.2 City of Trees have been working with the Council to enhance and protect woodland areas and the green nature of the borough. Trees were planted to create a small new woodland area adjacent to Clayton Playing Fields.
- 2.1.3 Community concerns related to the location of where the tress had been planted, surveillance and safety parameters due to how close together the trees had been planted, and whether there was an impact on the designate helipad used for air ambulances.
- 2.1.4 After investigating the matter, the following has been identified for Committee Members to note:
 - title records were not correct with the Land Registry, and therefore officers did not realise that the location of the tree planting fell under the charity committee remit. This is being rectified and the land titles corrected.
 - the contractor planting the trees has installed them at the wrong spacing compared to the instructions from officers.
- 2.1.5 Members are asked to:
 - i) approve retrospective tree planting around the edge of the area;
 - ii) note that a site visit will be arranged with residents and ward members to review and identify remedial actions to correct the errors detected; and
 - iii) delegate to the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) any further resolutions and actions on this matter.

2.2 Community Concerns

- 2.2.1 Unfortunately, the playing fields and community pitches in particular suffer from anti-social behaviour – dog walkers and quad bikes.
- 2.2.2 Dog walkers have no respect for the playing pitch areas, and many local community groups and clubs who use the facilities are reporting an increase in the amount of dog mess impacting on the players ability to play on clean / safe community pitches.
- 2.2.3 Quad Bikers continue to drive across the open playing pitch spaces causing significant damage to the playing fields – tyre tracks / torn grassed areas / uneven surfaces – again all impacting on community groups using the community pitches.
- 2.2.4 To enhance the pitch area, to reduce the health and safety concerns, and to help safeguard its intended use by the local community, Members of the Charity Committee are asked to consider the following proposals
- to introduce a designated walking route around the pitch areas (around the outside of the fields) to continue to allow local residents to walk their dogs, but away from the playing pitch areas;
 - to designate a dog park area (exact location to be agreed at the site visit with local ward members and residents) where dogs can run off the lead in a safe space; and
 - to permit the introduction of dog poo bins along the new walking route and by the designated dog park to encourage owners from allow their pets to leave a mess on the playing pitch areas.
- 2.2.5 To restrict / limit access to the community pitches by quad bikes and to prevent the associated damage to the pitches, Members of the Charity Committee are asked to consider the following proposals
- to install a single rail (knee-high) barrier around the perimeter of the pitches, minimising the impact on the community playing fields and their intended use, and allowing continued community access, but preventing unwanted vehicles from causing damage to the area.

2.3 Maintenance Agreement

- 2.3.1 As both Oldham Athletic Football Club and Oldham Rugby Clubs now train and play matches at the stadium at Boundary Park (adjacent to Clayton Playing Fields), the SportsTown partnership (see below) are interested in supporting the local community to access sports and have offered to maintain the playing fields on the Council's behalf to (at least) the Council's current standards.
- 2.3.2 Members are asked to approve a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to be drawn up for the maintenance of the playing fields in return for mid-week / daytime use of the pitch areas (i.e. at times when the area is not used by local community groups). The pitches would still be available for use by the local community and other clubs and community groups in the evenings and at weekends (as now).
- 2.3.3 The SLA would facilitate a license fee which would be based on the Council's standard rates for pitch hire (providing some additional income to the Council), and

on the Council's behalf, the community pitches and playing fields would be maintained. The activities would include litter-picking, grass-cutting, tree pruning, pitch repairs, and line repainted (other activities as per the current maintenance regime would be stipulated in the SLA to enhance and protect the playing fields).

- 2.3.4 The license / maintenance agreement would not give SportsTown exclusive rights to use the playing pitches, nor would it give them any rights or possession of the land. This agreement would not change the land status or requirements for any further items of consideration to be brought back to the charity committee. The agreement would provide maintenance income to the Council, the area would be maintained to the same (or higher) specification than it is now, and it would free up the limited Council resources for deployment in other areas of the borough.
- 2.3.5 Charity Committee Members are asked to note and agree the proposals for a Service Level Agreement with the SportsTown partnership and to delegate the details of the agreement and final approval of the maintenance agreement to the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) and the relevant portfolio holder.

2.4 SportsTown

- 2.4.1 Charity Committee Members are asked to note the recent Cabinet decision to accept the Community Regeneration Partnership funding designated for the support of SportsTown.
- 2.4.2 Landowners around Boundary Park Stadium (public and private sector) are working with a range of partners to establish an ambitious vision which defines plans to bring together Oldham's sporting excellence, health care and much needed enhanced educational pathways through the creation of a new centre of excellence whilst also increasing participation for a wide range of users at the heart of the community.
- 2.4.3 Sporting excellence within Oldham is well defined through Oldham's Rugby Club, Women's netball, Darts and Cricket. Latics, the Women's Football team and Oldham Rugby already utilise the facilities housed at the Boundary Park stadium / complex, which neighbours the Royal Oldham Hospital, for which there has been a working arrangement for hospital staff parking for some time.
- 2.4.4 The overarching vision builds on the recommendations from the Oldham Economic Review to create ambitious opportunities for growth in the borough and to accelerate skills pathways and job opportunities to create an exciting future for young people and future generations.
- 2.4.5 The public/ private partnership overseeing the site want to drive forward SportsTown as a key asset in central Oldham providing opportunities and excellence in sport (in football, rugby, netball, darts and cricket), higher education skills provision, improved facilities and increased access and participation by local groups, contributing to social cohesion and addressing health inequalities.
- 2.4.6 A proposed capital allocation of £5,000,000 will be utilised to support the delivery of SportsTown Phase 1 which will include:

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- Create new facilities for Higher Education, (HE), skills provision in the top floor of the Joe Royle Stand, including classrooms, access to specialist kit and changing facilities.
 - Modification of the Joe Royle Stand to facilitate the above, including relocation of gym to create a new safeguarding access to the venue.
 - Creation of new all-weather pitch on “Little Wembley” facility and 3G pitch, substantially increasing local use, access and participation.
 - Provision of new outdoor netball court facilities (Oldham is a top-performer in netball) and University 5G.

2.4.7 There is a strong identified need for the project; HE lacks all-weather facilities in a central location to help develop its sports science and related HE offer; high levels of health inequalities; and high levels of income, crime and education deprivation.

2.4.8 The project is part of a longer-term plan for SportsTown, which includes a netball arena, indoor 3G sports facilities and further main stadium improvements. The overall investment package for Sports Town is circa £70m with a robust governance / partnership framework to formalise the public / private partnership land interests and investment into the joint vision. *(This will be reported separately on completion of due diligence due to the commercial nature of the partnership).*

3. Recommendations

3.1 Charity Committee Members are asked to note and approve the recommendations set out in this report.