

Report for Charitable Trust Committee



Decision maker:	Charitable Trustee Committee
Decision date:	17 th March 2026
Subject:	Football Pitch at Bishops Park, Grains Bar, Oldham
Report author:	Alison Evans, Corporate Estates Manager
Ward (s):	St James

Reason for decision

The Charitable Trust Committee (CTC) have previously taken receipt of a request from Saddleworth Football Club seeking to bring a disused football pitch back in to use, which is on Charity Trust land.

On behalf of the CTC, Officers of the Council have investigated this request and are seeking to endorse the request from the Saddleworth Football Club for a 30 years lease (a term which would allow the Club to apply and draw down Football Association funding to invest in the facilities).

Recommendations for CTC:

Committee members on behalf of the Charity Trust, are asked to note the content of this report which acts as due diligence on the proposals submitted by Saddleworth Football Club, and are recommended to:

- approve the proposed lease of the football pitch to Saddleworth FC for a term of 30 years,
- approve the lease being used as part of a funding bid application to secure investment into the facilities to bring the pitch back into use and playable standards for use by themselves and other community football clubs; and
- note the works to be undertaken by the Club in bringing the pitches back into use, specifically a 'waist high rail'
- endorse Officer views that in supporting the proposals by the Club, no buildings or storage facilities are permitted on the land, no fencing is permitted and full community access should be maintained at all times.

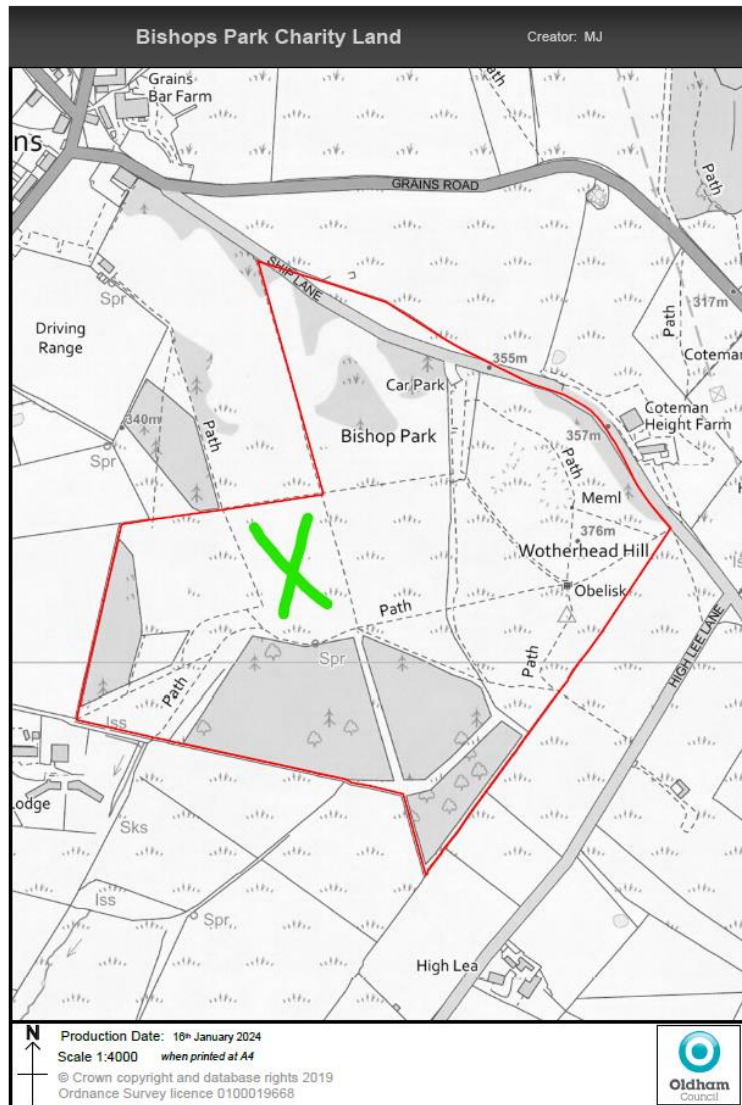
Bishop's Park Charitable Objectives

The land to be used as an open space or park for the free use and benefit of the inhabitants of the county borough of Oldham and district.

Background

Bishops Park is a large area of naturalised land which is a charitable asset and is freely available for the public to use. The extent of the charitable land is shown in red on the plan below.

Historically there were two football pitches on the land which were utilised by local clubs under the Council's pitch booking system. Saddleworth Football Club, a charity and mixed, multi-age football club, would like to bring the dis-used pitch at Bishops Park, highlighted in green on the plan, back into use and enter into a 30 year lease to enable them to access Football Association funding.



During the Covid pandemic the pitch fell into dis-use and has not been maintained or played on, since then. Saddleworth FC are a local team who are looking for a home base and would like to bring this pitch back into regular use, for both themselves and for the ability to hire out the pitch to other local clubs.

The land has been allowed to become naturalised and is not maintained by the Council. The land is part of the public open space land which forms the wider open moorland at Bishop's Park.

The club is an important community asset and supports a number of teams with aspirations to expand in the future.

The Club will only be given rights to invest in and utilise the pitch area, and that this lease arrangement will not enable any permissions for the erection of any buildings or storage facilities on the land. A 'waist high' rail is included in the plans around the edge of the pitch to de-mark the perimeter of the pitch; officers agree with this requirement, subject to CTC approvals in this report,

but Officers recommend that no other fencing will be erected, and the pitch must remain open to the general public, when there is no match being played.

Proposed New Lease Terms

Tenant	Saddleworth Football Club
Term	30 years (minimum required by Football Association)
Rent	£0 (peppercorn) - to be reviewed at year 3, to a market value
Breaks	No landlord or tenant breaks
Alienation	Lease to be assignable with CTC consent to another football club or charitable company
Use	Football pitch, not limited to use by Saddleworth FC
Costs	Tenant will be responsible for all running costs & maintenance of the pitch

The asset is public open space and is used mainly by dog walkers. The land is not suitable in its current condition to be used as a playing pitch.

A full proposal for the future use of the pitch has been received from Saddleworth FC and this is included in Appendix 1: they have been supported by Environmental Services team in formalising this proposal and in the requirements for future maintenance of the pitch.

Options Considered:

- **Option 1: Approve a lease to Saddleworth FC and allow the land to be brought back into use as a football pitch.**

To grant Saddleworth FC access to the land under the terms of a full repairing and insuring lease of the dis-used pitch at Bishop's Park, to allow the pitch to be brought back into use by the football club for use by themselves and other clubs. The land would remain open to the public and this agreement would allow a significant investment in the Sports facility and provides an enhanced community facility.

- **Option 2: Refuse the proposal and allow the land to become fully naturalised.**

The land is not currently maintained by the Council, so future maintenance of the land would be a pressure on Council budgets and if the land were allowed to become fully naturalised it would increasingly become difficult for the public to use the land effectively as self-seeded vegetation flourished.

This option would **disbenefit** the local community in having usable playing pitches, which would be funded from external grant support from the Football Association.

Consultation – This application is supported by the local Ward Cllr's.

Environmental Services are supporting the Club with the proposed specification for the pitch and future maintenance.

Implications

Financial	Dependent on the terms of the lease, any rental income from the lease to Saddleworth FC will be income to the charitable trust and will need to be spent in line with the charitable objectives of the trust. Saddleworth FC will be fully responsible for the maintenance costs of the pitch. The Council will be required to account for any income and expenditure in relation to the trust to the Charitable Trust Committee and Charity Commission. (James Postle, Finance Manager)
Legal	The land in question is, as has been stated, subject to charitable trusts ("the Charity") and is held by the Council as charity trustee the responsibilities for which are delegated to the Charitable Trust Committee ("CTC"). 1. The CTC must first approve the proposal in principle that it will be in the best interests of the Charity and the promotion of its objects. 2. As the lease is a disposal of charity land (by a lease of more than 7 years) the appropriate Charities Act report must be obtained from a suitably qualified adviser who must approve the proposed lease terms. Please note that the report's author may suggest certain changes to the terms. The CTC must authorise Oldham Estates to arrange for such report to be obtained. A designated adviser must be: • a fellow or professional associate of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors or • a fellow of the Central Association for Agricultural Valuers (CAAV) or • a fellow of the NAEA Propertymark (National Association of Estate Agents) The CTC must also be satisfied that the adviser has the ability in and experience of valuing similar land within the same area. It is recommended that a designated adviser in this instance should be someone unconnected with the Council.

	3. Owing to: 3.1 the land being designated land (it must be used for a specific purpose); 3.2 the fact that at least to a certain extent, the proposed lease will impact on the purpose for which the land is required to be used or how the charity furthers its purpose (by restricting its use to use as a playing field rather than for general recreation); 3.3 the fact that the governing document does not contain the necessary express powers for the CTC to dispose of the land (including the granting of leases), and 3.4 The fact (if this is the case) that despite the proposed tenant being itself a charity, its objects are not as wide as the objects of the Charity even though its objects may not conflict with the objects of the Charity. the CTC then need to authorise Legal Services to apply to the Charity Commission for the appropriate authority for the Charity granting the lease on the terms proposed to Saddleworth FC. If the Charity Commission require certain other steps to be taken as a condition of that authority then such requirements must be adhered to. 4. A notice must also be published pursuant to the Charities Act requirements. The notice must: • provide details of the land in question • explain how the CTC wishes to dispose of the land • invite people to contact the CTC with any objections or comments, and • give people a minimum of one month to contact the CTC following publication. The Notice should try to reach as many of the charity's beneficiaries as is reasonably possible (basically residents of Oldham Borough). The CTC need to know whether or not Saddleworth FC is a "connected person" for the purposes of the Charities Act as this would need to be disclosed to the Charity Commission when applying for authority.
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	A 'connected person' is defined in section 118 of the Charities Act. It is certain people or organisations closely connected to or associated with the Saddleworth FC and includes: • the trustees and their close relatives • a donor of any land to the charity and their close relatives • employees, agents or officers of the charity • the spouse or civil partner of either a trustee, donor of land, employee, or close relative of a trustee or donor • organisations in which any of the above have a controlling or substantial interest. This includes a wholly owned subsidiary of your charity The CTC should check the list in section 118 of the Charities Act or get professional advice if it is unsure whether someone is a connected person. If in doubt it is suggested that a full disclosure is made to the Charity Commission when applying for authority for the disposal. (Zoe Theofilopoulos - Solicitor)
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Appendix 1 – Proposal from Saddleworth

Saddleworth Football Club

Proposal to upgrade football pitches at Bishop Park, Denshaw

Version 1.0, 6 October 2025



1. Introduction

1.1 The proposal

Saddleworth Football Club (SFC) proposes an agreement with Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC) for SFC to carry out upgrading and ongoing maintenance of the two existing grass football pitches at Bishop Park, Ripponden Rd, Grains Bar, Oldham OL4 2JZ. SFC would be committed to a multi-year agreement, subject to approval.

The grass football pitches fall within charitable land. See the area marked X in section 1.2 Plan of Bishop Park. Therefore SFC is seeking approval from the OMBC Charitable Trust Committee to achieve this upgrade, which will provide significant benefit to the Saddleworth community.

The agreement would not be a lease, but purely an agreement stating the landowner (OMBC) would be happy for the land user (Club) to maintain the grass pitches at site. This would be funded by the Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund, which is in use for other pitches in the borough.

SFC, a junior and open age football club, which for the last decade has enabled hundreds of players of all abilities to enjoy playing the sport they love in a no-pressure, inclusive environment, is committed to a vision where significantly more sport is played in the Saddleworth area than the current situation.

Restoring the pitches at Bishop Park, which were in use prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, into high-quality, well-maintained grass surfaces aligns with SFC's vision. SFC is working with several other sporting partners in the area (Diggle Juniors FC, Greenfield Giants FC (an all-girls club), and Saddleworth Rangers Rugby Club), to explore long-term options in this regard, for both playing and training facilities. SFC would maintain the pitches, however their use could be extended to other teams/clubs outside of SFC.

1.2 Plan of Bishop Park



2. Project objectives and benefits

2.1 Overall objectives and additional context

There are six junior football clubs in the Saddleworth area: Diggle FC, Greenfield Giants, SFC, Saddleworth 3Ds FC, Springhead AFC and Uppermill FC. Between these clubs, there are over 70 junior teams. Some of these clubs also have “open age” (adult) teams. The number of teams requiring a “home” full size football pitch will continue to increase with the ever-growing popularity of the sport.

SFC's overall objective is to:

(a) develop a “home” venue for SFC teams, which can also be used by other clubs, from under 13s upwards. This would be for u13s (9 v 9) and u14s upwards (11 v 11).

(b) greatly improve the likelihood that its future junior teams will be able to regularly train and play in the Saddleworth area.

More details about the club's ethos can be found on www.saddleworthfc.org

2.2 Benefits of realising the vision

There are several benefits, including:

- The community benefits by being able to play/watch their children's teams play in the local area
- This has an environmental impact of less travel to longer distances
- Less match postponements (which are currently frequent) means the season finishes early, which is advantageous to u16s teams studying for their GCSEs.
- Additional community benefits, as exposing this site to children and young families will encourage them to utilise and respect it, as well as enjoy the other leisure services nearby (e.g. the "pitch and putt" golf course and the various pubs in the area.)

3. SFC's proposed plan to upgrade the grass pitches

3.1 Steps required to upgrade

SFC has consulted local companies who have decades of experience in updating and maintaining grass football pitches. Those companies have stated that upgrading the pitches at Bishop Park is feasible with the correct timing, planning and procedure. Representatives from these companies attended the site on 8 May 2025 with Alison Evans, Corporate Estates Manager, OMBC.

At a high level, the steps taken to upgrade the pitches would be:

- 1) Assess/install land drains
- 2) Implement weed control
- 3) Full renovation including levelling and seeding

See Appendix 1 for a quotation from G&J Collins.

Prior to the upgrade, SFC propose to undertake a full risk assessment, including evaluating and considering mitigation of the following risks (and any other identified risks by OMBC or the Charitable Committee):

- 1) The impact for local residents and businesses, and how SFC can work with them
- 2) The impact in terms of increased traffic in the area and use of the Ship Lane Car Park
- 3) The impact on the wider Bishop Park area
- 4) The current situation in terms of litter and dog fouling
- 5) Ensuring that the drainage of the pitches is fit for purpose
- 6) Ensuring that the pitches are not used during the upgrade

3.2 Funding

If SFC and OMBC reach a mutually-suitable maintenance agreement ("the agreement") for both pitches, SFC would seek funding through the Football Foundation Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund (FFGPMF). See <https://footballfoundation.org.uk/grant/grass-pitch-maintenance-fund>

The first step in applying for funding is securing the agreement. See Appendix 2 for a pro-forma of the agreement, supplied by Manchester Football Association.

The second step is to obtain a Pitch Power Assessment Report, which should validate SFC's own evidence of the site's feasibility and subsequently mean that FFGPMF will approve and grant tapered multi-year funding.

The Pitch Power Assessment Report includes:

- A performance quality standard for each pitch, indicating its current condition.
- Specific recommendations on how to improve and maintain the pitch quality.
- Bespoke advice tailored to the specific needs of the pitch.

The report is crucial for:

- Applying for grants for grass pitch maintenance and improvement, as the report demonstrates the need for funding.
- Identifying areas for improvement and implementing targeted maintenance strategies.
- Understanding the current condition of the pitch and setting goals for future maintenance.

Beyond that funding, SFC is committed to maintaining the site in any event.

SFC has discussed this proposal with Manchester Football Association, who have given SFC confidence that the funding should be granted. However, SFC would explore other/additional avenues for funding if necessary.

4. SFC stakeholders

4.1 List of SFC stakeholders initially involved in this proposal

Further stakeholders, including those nominated by OMBC, will be added to later drafts of this document and/or subsequent documentation as appropriate. SFC also propose the creation of a community forum allowing impacted stakeholders (eg local businesses, Denshaw residents) to be consulted and informed on an ongoing basis, if the project moves forward.

Name	Role in project	Experience
Mike Leyland Club Chairperson, Academy Lead and Coach at Saddleworth FC	Project Sponsor (1) Provides overall vision and acts as the main advocate for the project. (2) Liaises with third parties including Manchester FA. (3) Communicates regularly with nominated representatives of the school to jointly set direction.	Professional Experience: Mike is a Business Analyst with a Software Consultancy, and has operated in complex, multi-year technology programmes for almost two decades. Personal Experience: Mike has coached junior teams for several years, runs the club's Football Academy, and commentates for Oldham Athletic FC.
Tom Matley Coach at Saddleworth FC	Club Liaison Officer	Professional Experience: Tom has worked in accounting and

and Welfare Officer and Coach at Diggle Juniors FC	(1) Engages with the wider club and other local clubs on progress and gathers feedback. (2) Fields questions about the project and provides feedback/suggestions to the wider project team.	sales ledger teams for several years, including within a professional football club environment. Personal Experience: Tom coaches teams at both SFC and Diggle Juniors FC, and is a co-founder of the junior section at Diggle.
Andy Gartside Legal Director Centrefield LLP	Legal Advisor (1) Advises on legal aspects of the project. (2) Advises on funding (3) Liaises with local professional football clubs	Professional Experience: Andy brings a breadth of both legal and football administration know-how and is the former Chief Executive of Bolton Wanderers FC.
Graham Asplin Club Secretary at Saddleworth FC	Council Liaison Officer (1) Engages with the local authority on the necessary steps for applying for approval of this project. (2) Provides guidance and feedback on the planning application process to the wider project team.	Professional Experience: Graham is the Manager of a Children's Care Home and brings several years' experience of working with local authorities. Personal Experience: Graham has been a coach and secretary at multiple football clubs and has extensive knowledge of the football landscape in the borough.
Scott Buckle Landscape gardener and ground maintenance provider J Buckle & Sons	Pitch Adviser Provides advice and guidance to SFC on pitch upgrading and maintenance.	Professional Experience: Scott has decades' worth of experience upgrading and maintaining football pitches for many clients within his family business.

5. Summary

5.1 Summary of this proposal

Demand for junior sports in Saddleworth and the wider Oldham area continues to rise, and the physical/mental health-related benefits of enabling these sports are clear. SFC is taking action to solve a major problem that exists today and will only increase tomorrow, with no quick fix. With this proposed partnership, OMBC and SFC can re-plant the seeds for a football landscape in a unique setting for both organisations to be proud of, which will make a huge difference to many generations to come.

Bringing the Bishop Park pitches "back to life" would represent a significant step in SFC's mission of providing the people of Saddleworth, and the wider area, the playing opportunities they deserve.