



AGENDA ITEM: 6(f)

CABINET: 18 June 2013

Report of: Assistant Director Community Services

Relevant Managing Director: Managing Director (People and Places)

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor D Sudworth

**Contact for further information: John Nelson (Extn. 5157)
(E-mail: John.Nelson@westlancs.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: ABBEY LANE PLAYING FIELDS, TRANSFER TO COMMUNITY SPORTS CLUB

Wards affected: Ormskirk and Burscough Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To consider a proposal to transfer the Abbey Lane playing fields to a community sports club as part of an opportunity to attract external grant funding to support drainage improvements works to the site.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Assistant Director Community Services and the Assistant Director Housing and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Regeneration and Estates be authorised:
- a) to grant a long term lease at a peppercorn rent to Burscough Juniors Football Club for the changing room and pitches located at Abbey Lane playing fields, as edged red on the plan attached at Appendix 1, with provision for the club to seek funding for improvements to the site with restrictions that the site should be used for multi-sport activities and not restricted to single sport use.
 - b) to identify and engage a contractor to carry out the drainage works on the site.

- c) to take all necessary steps, enter into all necessary agreements and to obtain any consents and permissions.
-

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Abbey Lane playing fields site, also known as the Thomas Galvin Sports Ground, contains six adult football pitches and accommodates two cricket pitches. Building changing accommodation is comprised of twelve team changing rooms, separate changing for officials, a community/training room, first aid room and a small kitchen area.
- 3.2 The site was established in 1994 and has been used predominantly by football teams since its opening; additional space is allocated which allows for two cricket pitches to be made available during summer months and since 2011 an archery club have also been based at the site.
- 3.3 The drainage system has had particular problems over the last two years with the surface drainage system being compacted over time and the lower level drains requiring major works to improved flow and capacity. This has resulted in the pitches being unplayable for most of the season. Teams are no longer able to commit to a season booking due to the intermittent availability of the pitches.
- 3.4 Burscough Juniors football club was formed in 2002 following the joining together of Burscough FC and Burscough Dynamo's and provide football for boys and girls from age six onwards. Burscough Juniors has since separated from Burscough Football club and now operates independently from the senior club.
- 3.5 The primary objective of Burscough Juniors Football Club is to provide boys and girls the opportunity to participate in competitive football, organised training and receive appropriate coaching in basic football skills. As a secondary objective, it aims to provide 'football related activities' for players and organise fund raising and social events, in support of the Club, for parents.
- 3.6 The club have 30 boys and girls teams in a number of age groups which have had substantial success and provided players and coaches who have developed and provided representation and support at regional and national level. The club provide a pathway towards senior level clubs and provide coaching and football skills session for other clubs in the West Lancashire area. The Club is registered with the FA and holds a Club Mark accreditation certificate.
- 3.7 The Borough Council has arrangements with a number of sports clubs across the Borough who are engaged in long term lease/partnership arrangements for Council owned facilities. This includes Liverpool Road Juniors, Newburgh Cricket Club, Apply Bridge Football Club and Ormskirk Rugby Club. All of the clubs have arrangements which provide for exclusive use of all or part of the sites which enable them to attract external grant funding to enhance the facilities.

3.8 Discussions had been held with Ormskirk Rugby Club in 2009/10 regarding relocation to the Abbey Lane site; the Rugby Club considered the option but decided to remain in Ormskirk at the Green Lane site and not move towards Burscough.

3.9 The Abbey Lane site is within the Ormskirk Boundary, but it is perceived by residents and those using the site as being located in Burscough.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The Club are looking for a permanent base and seeking to provide improvements to the Abbey Lane facilities, seeking grant funding from the Football Foundation to match the Council's capital allocation towards drainage improvements. The facility at Abbey Lane will provide a base for the Club to support future club development, particularly in respect of young people, mixed gender use and disability accessibility.

4.2 Council officers have met with Club officials, Burscough Parish Council, Liverpool FA and officers from the Football Foundation to discuss lease and investment options for the Abbey Lane Site. The Parish Council support the proposal from the Club and welcome the option to improve the facilities at the site. The Parish Council may provide additional support of a small grant to support junior football development in the Burscough area, particularly within schools and local junior football teams.

4.3 Burscough Juniors Football Club has been successful with an initial expression of interest grant application and has received support from Liverpool FA towards submitting a final bid for funding from the Football Foundation. The grant would be for funding towards playing pitch improvements (drainage). The Football Foundation grant is normally a match funding allocation with a maximum grant of 50%. The estimates for the drainage work at Abbey Lane are £240,000.

4.4 The Council have allocated a sum of £100,000 towards the drainage works at Abbey lane, this would normally only attract a further £100,000 grant funding leaving the estimate cost of the works short by £40,000. The Club are unable to meet this shortfall. Any grants from the Parish Council can not be used towards the drainage work as the site is technically outside of the Burscough ward boundary.

4.5 The Football Foundation have agreed to the principal of awarding a higher level of grant towards meeting the shortfall in the project works and following a meeting on site have also indicated additional funding towards grounds maintenance equipment.

5.0 THE TRANSFER PROCESS

5.1 The Club require security of tenure of at least 25 years in order to secure the Football Foundation grant funding. The Club have requested a lease of a

minimum period of 25 years to secure the grant but would welcome a longer term.

- 5.2 Despite the ongoing problems with drainage, the site continues to provide opportunities for cricket and archery; any community transfer would need to recognise the multi sport use at the site and a community use agreement would be attached to the lease to ensure the site remains in use as multi use sports facility.
- 5.3 The Football Foundation grant will be awarded to Burscough Juniors Football Club subject to entering a lease with the Council for the site. However the Borough Council will be the recipient of the grant monies and will be the responsible body for ensuring that the funding is managed within appropriate procurement rules and probity. The Borough Council will therefore take the responsibility for the engagement of contractors and supervision of the works. This protects the Borough Council investment in the facility and the project management for the works.
- 5.4 In order to ensure that future drainage issues and problems were reduced the Council allocated from 2014/15 a specific budget item of £15,000 towards the ongoing maintenance cost of the drainage system. It is proposed that this sum continues to be allocated each year to fund scheduled annual maintenance works for the drainage system with this work being coordinated by the Borough Council.
- 5.5 One of the biggest financial outlays for the site is the day to day grounds maintenance cost. The Club would be unable to undertake the responsibility for this element of the site costs as well as taking over the responsibility for the changing rooms operation of the building. Discussions with Football Foundation officials and the Club have concluded that in order for the grant application to succeed that the Council would continue to cut the grass and undertake routine day to day grounds maintenance tasks under the existing specification.
- 5.6 The Club have agreed to undertake line marking and undertake any additional maintenance of the drainage system over and above the funding allocated by the Council. Any additional grass cuts or grounds maintenance work over the current specification would be funded from the club.
- 5.7 The Club would be responsible for maintaining the building, internal roads, car parking area and paths, access gates and fence lines, service costs for the changing facilities and any additional works required on site together with paying all services cost and the rates bill for the site.
- 5.8 The Club will be providing a business plan and financial projections for the submission to the Football Foundation to provide assurance that the project is sustainable. Officers from the Borough Council will be involved in providing information and will assist towards the development of the plan and will be able to assess the viability of the grant project submission and long-term sustainability of the transfer.

5.9 A part time member of staff works weekends to open and close the facilities at Abbey Lane and Blaguegate playing fields. The part time hours are reduced during summer months with the member of staff providing cover at Abbey Lane only, to cover the opening of the facilities for the cricket season. Discussions will be undertaken with the member of staff and Unions regarding relocation of the hours or redundancy, as a result of the transfer of the Abbey Lane site to a community club.

6.0 DISPOSAL

6.1 Abbey Lane playing fields was purchased from Lancashire County Council by West Lancashire District for the sum of £51,250 in 1992. The site had formally been the camp for nearby former Burscough aerodrome. The land is in the asset register as having a de minimus value however the changing rooms/pavilion area has an existing use value of £584,153. Members should be mindful that by granting a lease of at least 25 years to the Burscough Junior football club the site is effectively taken out of the Council's control for purposes of the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) process. However, officers believe that there is sufficient alternative sites which could be utilised in this regard.

6.2 The disposal is at less than best value but members may believe that the social, economic and environmental benefit which will be gained by letting the site and securing the funding for drainage works is sufficient mitigation. A plan of the site is attached at appendix 1.

6.3 The disposal of a facility/land at less than the best value that can reasonably be obtained may require Secretary of State Consent. Providing that the undervalue does not exceed £2m and that there are social, economic and environmental benefits in transferring the land then the Council can transfer the land at an undervalue and there will be no need to obtain specific Secretary of State consent. The Land is accorded the status of EN3 Green Infrastructure/Recreation Space in the soon to be adopted Local Plan which will be in force until 2027 and accordingly its valuation does not exceed £2m therefore Secretary of State Consent is not required.

6.4 The transfer to the Club provides the Council with significant grant funding which would not otherwise be available to the Council. The benefits to the community from this arrangement include investment to improve the site facilities and secure and provide for long term sustainable community facility.

6.5 A community use agreement with the Club will ensure access is provided to other sports clubs and sports activities outside of football, protection of the existing cricket pitches, access for archery and for other sports will be important to ensure a multi sports access and protect community use for the site.

- 6.6 The particular arrangement with the junior club will see the site used by much larger numbers of junior teams, and will have a positive impact on health, inclusion and community use of the site.

7.0 PROPOSALS

- 7.1 It is proposed that subject to discussions with Burscough Juniors Football Club, that the Council enter into a long lease (minimum 25 years) at a peppercorn rent for the facilities at the Abbey Lane site, with provision for the Club to seek funding for improvements to the site with restrictions that the site should be used for multi-sport activities and not restricted to single sport use.
- 7.2 The lease with the Club is conditional to the Club being awarded the Football Foundation grant funding.
- 7.3 The Council will continue to provide day to day grounds maintenance under an agreed schedule. The Council would continue to cut the grass and undertake routine day to day grounds maintenance tasks under the existing specification.
- 7.4 The Council allocated from 2014/15 a specific budget item of £15,000 pa towards the ongoing maintenance cost of a replacement drainage system. It is proposed that this sum continues to be allocated to the site.
- 7.5 The Club have agreed to undertake the responsibility for service charges, building and access maintenance and any additional grounds maintenance work for the site, including day to day works and supplementary costs for ongoing drainage maintenance works and improvements.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 8.1 The proposals will allow Burscough Juniors Football Club to increase involvement in community activity and club development and subject to grant funding, will support access to quality facilities and will have a positive impact on health, inclusion and community use of the site.

9.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council have allocated a capital sum of £100,000 towards the drainage improvement works at the Abbey Lane site.
- 9.2 In addition to the capital funding the Council allocated from 2014/15 a specific budget item of £15,000 pa towards the ongoing maintenance cost of the drainage system. It is proposed that this sum continues to be allocated each year to fund scheduled annual maintenance works for the drainage system with this work being coordinated by the Borough Council.

- 9.3 The Capital Grant of £140,000 from the Football Foundation, towards the drainage improvements works, is only available to community clubs, the partnership arrangement with Burscough Juniors is therefore essential in attracting the external funding.
- 9.4 A part time member of staff works weekends to open and close the facilities at Abbey Lane and Blaguegate playing fields. The hours are reduced during summer months with the member of staff providing cover at Abbey Lane only, to cover the opening of the facilities for the cricket season. A small reduction on staff cost will be achievable as a result of the transfer of the Abbey Lane site to a community club. A small redundancy cost associated with the loss of summer hours may need to be accommodated this is expected to be less than £500.
- 9.5 The overall cost of managing the site under this arrangement will be lower than the Councils current operating costs, the club will be able to attract a reduction on the rates payable for the site of 80% and be able to reduce operational costs for the site as a result of voluntary support for the club.
- 9.6 Although not the primary driver for the transfer, savings will be achieved for the Council from building service and building maintenance costs which will be reduced as a result of the transfer this is estimated at £10,800. Although the Council will no longer collect income from the site in the future.
- 9.7 The budget income estimates for 2013/14 is £4,600. This budget income figure will not be achieved in this year and would not in any case be achievable in future years without the capital investment grant funding and drainage improvements.

10.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 The granting of a long lease and license to the Club for the Abbey Lane site will restrict the Councils options for this site for the term of the agreements.
- 10.2 The Club may cease to operate or may not be able to sustain the operation of the site. The facilities would then be transferred back to the Borough Council. Assessment of the business plan and governance arrangements for the Club will be scrutinised to identify and minimise any problems with the sustainability of the Club. The award of the Football Foundation grant will be subject to providing a viable and sustainable business plan.
- 10.3 The grant application to the Football Foundation is made by Burscough Juniors Football Club; the award of any grant will be to Burscough Juniors Football Club. While the Council will facilitate the project management and engagement of the contractors for the works, the responsibility for any potential clawback from the Football Foundation for non performance and future delivery remains with the club.

11.0 CONCLUSIONS

11.1 That Burscough Juniors Football Club provides a valuable community and recreational service and the Council should support their development proposals by providing the security of a dedicated site for the club to develop. The lease option will also provide access to external grant funding for improvements to the site from a grant source which would not otherwise be available to the Council.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix 2 to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the recommendations contained within this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1	Plan of the Abbey Lane Site
Appendix 2	Equality Impact Assessment