SUBJECT: TOWER HILL PLAYING FIELD, UPHOLLAND

Wards affected: UpHolland.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consider a request from a local football club for an agreement for them to secure the long term use of playing fields at Tower Hill Road Playing Field, UpHolland.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Tower Hill Road Playing Fields ceased to be used as formal football pitches over 10 years ago. Since then their use was primarily as training facilities, until 4 years ago when their use for sports activities ceased entirely. Since that time the field has been used as public open space.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The Council has been approached by a club currently based in Billinge with a request to lease the area to be used, initially, as a football pitch with an option to
build changing rooms at the site. The land requested is approximately 3.0 hectares including a small area for parking.

4.2 Billinge Football Club (the "Club") currently play in the Cheshire League First Division and have first team, reserve team, Under 21 team and under 12 team. The Club is looking for a location to develop their club and provide quality facilities for them and the community.

4.3 The Club have proposed use of the site which would include utilising it for a basic Step 7 facility (as defined by the Football Association), which would include one football pitch, changing rooms, and adequate car parking, with the hope that if successful in the future they could progress to Step 6, subject to the provision of additional playing and spectator facilities and various approvals. Step 6 would involve works which may require the consent of Homes England. This issue is presently being clarified.

4.4 Bringing this playing field facility back into use will help the Borough to cater for future demand for pitches as shown in the Playing Pitch Strategy 2018, and would hopefully be supported financially through the Local Football Facilities Plan currently being developed by Lancashire FA.

5.0 PROPOSALS

5.1 This is potentially a very beneficial scheme for the community of UpHolland, and for West Lancashire as a whole, bringing a currently unused playing field facility back into use. It is proposed, therefore that discussions with the Club continue and that, subject to a viable business case being put forward, and all necessary consents being obtained, the Council approve entering into the necessary lease and licence arrangements, for the proposals to be realised.

5.2 The benefit to the local community would be a crucial element in approving this proposal and the inclusion of a community use agreement within the lease/licence agreements would ensure these benefits. As an indicator of their intentions Billinge FC have agreed to change their name to Billinge and Upholland FC in anticipation of the move to Tower Hill Road.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

6.1 The project will support the Council’s strategic aims in respect of improving access to quality facilities, providing facilities to improve the health and quality of life of the community.

6.2 The community use agreement for the site will allow wider involvement from the local community.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
7.1 The Club have indicated that they would bid for Football Association funding to complement their own investment. At this stage they have not requested direct funding support from the Council.

7.2 The lease/licence to be entered into would be for 25 years to allow security of tenure to attract external funding. The rental to be charged by the Council would be negotiated with the Club but would be similar to a comparable site at Richmond Park, Burscough which is £530 per annum for pitch rental and £250 per annum for changing room rental.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 A risk to this scheme is the capital funding requirement for the changing facilities and car park extension. However, the club is in a position to provide some capital funding and a good business plan is likely to attract Football Association funding through the Local Football Facilities Plan currently being established.

8.2 A detailed business plan would be an essential requirement of the scheme to justify its viability and give potential funders the confidence to allocate resources.

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 to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Tower Hill Road Playing Fields, UpHolland – Site Plan
Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment