

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	19 October 2011
3.	Title:	A report to summarise the consultation carried out regarding rugby development on Herringthorpe Playing Fields
4.	Directorate:	Environment and Development Services

### 5. Summary

This report updates Cabinet on progress relating to the potential lease of an area of Herringthorpe Playing Fields to Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd. it summarises the consultation responses received following a programme (between April and August 2011) which targeted passive and active users of the site as well as local residents.

### 6. Recommendations

That Cabinet approves the proposal from the Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd. to lease an area of Herringthorpe Playing Fields at Herringthorpe for the exclusive purpose of rugby development subject to appropriate mitigating actions (as outlined) being implemented.

## 7. Proposals and Details

This report provides an update to an earlier report to cabinet (23<sup>rd</sup> March 2011) regarding a proposal from the Rotherham Rugby Club Ltd (the Club) to lease an area of the Herringthorpe Playing Fields. Their aim is to develop 3 rugby pitches for training, competitive matches and community development. The Club is a self-financing company limited by guarantee. Though the Club has some links with Rotherham Titans, which the Council supported with a £50,000 one year loan, there is no financial or legal relationship between the two. Approving this proposal would encourage the expansion of amateur rugby in the Borough and the improvement of a major sports site in the borough. The proposal does not affect current pitch provision on site as three additional pitches will be created by slightly rearranging the layout of the existing pitches.

The Club needs a minimum 21 year lease which is a funding requirement to safeguard this level of investment (greater than £50,000). We are advised that the Rugby Football Union is likely to support a conditional funding application from the Club. They have held discussions with the Planning Service, which has not identified any major issues relating to the proposal. A formal planning application would follow in due course if the proposal is approved.

In order to test levels of public support, a programme of consultation has been carried out. This targeted local residents, pitch users, the two area assemblies and members from the surrounding wards. It consisted of a press release, a leaflet drop to householders surrounding the affected area and distribution map (annex 1 & 2), a website and email post box backed up by a postal mail box and advice facility. It included a mail out to site user groups and a meeting at the town hall hosted by Cllr Dodson, chair to the Rotherham South Area Assembly and attended by Cllr Currie chair of Wentworth South Area Assembly, along with ward members from the affected wards. The Town Hall meeting was held on 14th June at the Town Hall at 17:00. Consultation commenced on 1st April 2011 and closed at the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2011.

### Summary of the consultation responses

A total of 76 people responded both online and by post. In addition the Area Assemblies Rotherham South and Wentworth South hosted a meeting at Rotherham Town Hall where a total of 60 members of the public attended the meeting including 6 children. A number of people phoned in for further information.

Of the responses received by email and by post, 19 were supportive while 57 people were opposed to the proposals. Key objection raised came mostly from immediate residents and can be summarised as follows:

- **Loss of amenity** – loss of access to the pitches for casual use by walkers, and by children and young people for informal games. Access will be prevented by the proposed fencing.  
Comment: Of the existing green space that makes up the Herringthorpe Playing Fields over 90% remains unaffected by these proposals. There will be little loss of amenity. The footprint of the old Leisure Centre is not included in this calculation.

- **Visual** – two issues were highlighted. Fencing and lighting will be visually intrusive. The fencing will break up the open nature of the fields and the lighting will shine through household windows at night time.

Comment: The proposed fencing will be over 25 metres from the nearest houses and will be limited to 1.8 metres in height. It will be of an open weldmesh construction covered in a green pvc coating. Modern fencing of this type blends into its surroundings and while it will be seen it is unlikely to be particularly intrusive (annex 3). The fencing would restrict access and is a condition of funding from the RFU.

Lighting will be on during the earlier part of the evening only (up to 9:30 pm). It is proposed that 15 meter high lighting columns would be installed around the three pitches. The lighting columns would be situated a minimum distance of 52.7 meters from the nearest housing on Baddsley Moor Lane and 62.5 metres on Baddsley Street South. Lighting from the columns will be directional with a maximum value of 150.0 lux directed onto the pitches. The light pollution factor within 5 meters of the pitches drops to 5 lux and light pollution will be a maximum of 1 Lux when it reaches the nearest houses (an average street light is 10 Lux). Therefore it can be shown that light pollution will be very low away from the pitches (annex 4).

- **Wrong Location** – local residents would prefer to see the facility located at the other end of the site where the old leisure centre was situated.

Comment: This is not possible as cabinet has allocated this area to other uses.

- **Traffic** – residents have said that they are concerned about the problem of additional parking on local streets which are already congested, particularly on match days.

Comment: the club has calculated average increases in car movements relating to the activities on the three pitches throughout the week. It has developed a car parking plan and has issued its members with a car parking protocol to encourage a range of measures to deter members from parking at the site. These include car sharing and utilising 40+ parking spaces at the Clifton Lane grounds. Monitoring of levels of cars parking for mini-rugby training sessions identified an average of 12 to 13 cars session. Visiting junior sides are often accompanied by a core of parents who also provide transport for the team. There would be an average of a dozen or so visitors' cars when two junior sides are playing at home. These should usually be accommodated within the Clifton Lane site. Spectator numbers at the senior side league games tend to be very low and are generally limited to team coaches, replacement players and a small number of interested individuals, (average number 12 to 15 people in total but there can be as many as 50 to 60 people at an end of season important "play-off" match. For most match days visitors' cars will be accommodated within the Clifton Lane site (assuming that the Titans move to Millmoor), but there will undoubtedly be occasional times when street parking will need to be used. Clearly numbers will vary from week to week.

Whilst the Rotherham Titans do not have an agreement at Millmoor as yet and though they believe this will be concluded in time for next season nothing can be taken for granted. When a lease is agreed, it is the Titan's intention only to use Millmoor for competitive matches. They want to play Championship and Cup games there and would also want to promote the venue as a rugby playing centre (to play County and representative matches). As a result no training would take

place at that ground and with the anticipated transfer to Millmoor there will be a large net reduction of street parking on matchdays as Titan's home fixtures currently generate a large influx of cars.

The Titans intend to retain Clifton Lane as their base. They have their Community Foundation at Clifton Lane which has had a long term investment in facilities and infrastructure (computer suite, teaching rooms etc). The Foundation is critical to the long term stability of the Club as all players are involved in its activities which is seen as a benefit to the Rotherham community at large. In view of this the Titans will, for the foreseeable future, retain ownership and use of Clifton Lane. Because of this, it can be assumed that parking at the Clifton Lane Grounds will continue to be available to the Rotherham Rugby Club.

- **Inadequate Facilities** – the lack of toilet facilities will be an obvious cause of problems on site if the facility is developed.

Comments: The Club has indicated that it is willing to build toilet facilities into its proposals for the site. There is no proposal to provide changing facilities.

Comments from those in support of the proposal included the following points;

The proposed facility would provide a permanent base for amateur rugby for all ages in Rotherham. The council cannot afford investment in quality provisions. The development of the sports pitches by the Club should be applauded at a time when budgets are tight. Any initiative to support quality sport at a local level should be supported. Decent Rugby facilities for the junior and amateur game are long overdue and this proposal adds value to the local area. Schemes that encourage young people (and senior teams) to participate in sport have to be welcomed. Promoting exercise encourages healthy lifestyles. Rugby is an excellent way to keep fit while instilling morals and values. The chances of young people's involvement in anti-social activities are reduced through rugby - the values instilled will make them more likely to challenge anti-social behaviour.

Residents who are concerned about parking problems may be confusing this with the problems that occur on the Titans match days when 1200-1500 people descend on the area. This causes congestion on the side roads around Clifton Lane. Significantly lower numbers attend Phoenix training days. Parking should be no worse than when any local club, be it rugby, football or cricket, have fixtures on at Herringthorpe. Additionally the Club has access to parking facilities at Clifton Lane for 40 cars. Any disturbance caused through their parking should be minimal. Monitoring of car parking on Club training days took place recently and over a two day period there were an average of 12.5 cars and these were easily accommodated at Clifton Lane grounds.

Players have experienced a range of problems over the years which would be addressed by fencing provision. These include cars being driven through the middle of a junior training session, an off-road biker doing the same thing, the need to clear broken bricks and glass bottles prior to training / playing so that children have a safe area and poop-scooping pitches to make sure that they are clean.

The mitigation measured described above address the concerns of local residents: loss of amenity, visual impact, wrong location of facilities on site, traffic and

inadequate facilities. These are addressed above and do not have the impact feared by local residents. For these reasons and because rugby and any sport activity is beneficial to health, it is felt that these proposals should be supported.

## **8. Finance**

The Club is responsible for securing the funding for the development and has agreed to cover the Council's costs. A promise of funding by the Rugby Football Union has been given, through a combination of grant and an interest free loan, to be guaranteed by the Club's members. This funding is subject to satisfactory planning approvals and lease agreements being in place. There are no financial consequences to the Council of this development.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

Subject to the outcome of member's considerations, the Club would next submit a planning application. If successful it will then seek funding for its proposals. If this were to be unsuccessful then there should be a clause giving both parties the option to cancel the lease agreement.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

### **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

CSART – 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Cabinet – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2011

Richard Waller - Legal Services

Jon Baggaley – Financial Services

Cabinet had previously approved disposal (and subsequent ringfencing of the Capital receipt) of the Leisure Centre site and Boswell St site on 20th January 2010 (minute no. C167).

**Contact Name : Nick Barnes, Principal Project Development Officer, x22882**  
[nick.barnes@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:nick.barnes@rotherham.gov.uk)