

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 14

meeting date: TUESDAY, 10 MARCH 2020
title: PITCH IMPROVEMENT PLAN
submitted by: JOHN HEAP – DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: MARK BEVERIDGE – HEAD OF CULTURAL AND LEISURE SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide an update on the Council's pitch improvement plan for grass pitches.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
- Community Objectives – To help make people's lives safer and healthier.
 - To ensure a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on identified customer need.
 - To protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of our area.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council has over the past few years, invested steadily in the grass pitches it provides to improve the quality of provision. New equipment has been purchased to help improve drainage and the pitch lines this season were done using GPS. Despite this they are subject to the vagaries of the weather and the sheer volume of rainfall this winter has meant no play has been possible on them for several months.
- 2.2 The Football Association is keen to improve the quality of grass pitches across England and has been encouraging local authorities to engage in its Pitch Improvement Programme (PiP). This involves the FA working with a local area, assessing the demand and determining priorities for the development of pitches, both grass and synthetic. It is not expected that every PiP will be implemented fully, simply because the FA are aware of the financial constraints on the public purse. However, the FA are keen to help authorities and clubs to implement PiP, through access to grants for equipment purchase, improvement schemes etc.

3 THE CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 This Council has participated in the PiP for Ribble Valley, along with colleagues from the Lancashire FA, which has resulted in a document which identifies a number of key priorities, as well as some suggested improvements for the existing grass pitches in the borough. Some of these are owned by the Council others are owned/leased and managed by local football clubs.
- 3.2 The fact that this Council has invested in a new synthetic surface facility, the first community facility in the borough, has been welcomed by the County FA. Although it recognised that others are needed to meet the overall demand in the borough.

4 ISSUES

- 4.1 The Council's pitches provide an opportunity for people to play sport, however, because they are not closed off from an access perspective, they also get used by dog owners. Some of whom allow their pets to foul the pitches. Other inappropriate uses which have been reported include golfers, personal fitness instructors, remote off-road cars and pre-season training by clubs who do not book a pitch.

4.2 The scope of the PiP is such that few authorities can hope to implement them fully, because of the cost. There is a limited income from club use and it is not realistic to believe that the income could offset the improvement costs. However, the FA are willing to provide grants and these will be explored to see what scope there is to obtain these. These grants are also available for local clubs to apply for as well, not just Local Authorities.

5 RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The Council has a fixed budget for grounds maintenance which includes any improvements to the grass pitch stock. Work over and above that will have to be carefully considered within the context of resource availability. However, the opportunity to seek grant funding would enable more improvement works to be carried out, if they were successfully obtained.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Council has some expertise for implementing the recommendations made in the PiP, however it may be necessary in the future, depending upon the nature of the work, to engage more specialist advice.
- Political – None.
- Reputation – Unfortunately the expectation of football clubs sometimes is beyond the scope of the Council to deliver, despite the investment in the pitches we manage. Their surfaces will never compare with those of local clubs who are able to control access and avoid many of the misuse issues that the Council land suffers from.
- Equality and Diversity – None.

6 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

6.1 Note the report.

MARK BEVERIDGE
HEAD OF CULTURAL & LEISURE SERVICES

JOHN HEAP
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES