

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET4 March 2021Report by Director of EnvironmentCROOKFUR PLAYING FIELDS – LEASE BY ST CADOC'S YOUTH CLUB**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To advise the Cabinet on a request from St Cadoc's Youth Club to lease an area of the Council owned Crookfur playing fields to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- a) Notes the proposal to grant a 25 year lease of an area of the Crookfur Playing Fields to St Cadoc's Youth Club; and
 - b) Requests the Director of Environment to undertake the necessary advertisement process in respect of such a proposal and in due course to bring a further report to Cabinet advising of the terms of any objections received in response to the advertisement.

BACKGROUND

3. The Council has 3 large youth football clubs within its boundary each of which have amongst the largest membership of players anywhere in Scotland. Barrhead Youth Football Club has previously been provided with Council funds to establish a pitch and changing rooms at Cowan Park, and Giffnock Soccer Centre has been provided with funds to construct a pitch within Eastwood Park.

4. St Cadoc's Youth Club is a similar sized club to those mentioned above and has a current arrangement for priority booking of the pitch at Eastwood High School.

5. St Cadoc's has a membership of 752 registered footballers, and has a predicted need for future pitch lets which the Council is unlikely to be able to fulfil given the limited facilities available and lack of suitable land to provide such facilities. The Club has a commitment to inclusivity and has achieved Quality Mark status for a Community Club.

6. The Club has recently approached the Council seeking to lease a piece of land at Crookfur Playing Fields to develop as a home ground.

7. A part of Crookfur Park was utilised to facilitate the provision of the Early Years' Nursery development and associated car parking. As the former Crookfur pavilion and changing rooms were in very poor condition they were demolished to make way for the Early Years' Nursery as part of the rebuild proposal.

8. The new pavilion comprises 4 changing rooms and associated facilities to allow the Council to continue letting the associated 2 grass pitches. Whilst they form part of the same building as the nursery these changing facilities can be secured internally to allow exclusive use for teams playing on the pitches. This allows independence from any events undertaken within the rest of the facility.

9. The playing fields at Crookfur currently comprise two grass pitches, which although well utilised at weekends, only bring the Council in a modest annual sum of around £4,200 for pitch rentals. This sum has to be considered in the context of the cost to upkeep the pitches which is around £13,000 per annum.

10. During the construction of the new pavilion existing lets required to be moved and these were accommodated with little impact on the clubs affected. It is therefore considered that the Council could allow St Cadoc's Youth Club to take on these playing fields at Crookfur with little impact on other clubs and which could potentially release other venues currently used by St Cadoc's to be used by other smaller clubs.

REPORT

11. The request from St Cadoc's was received after the decision by the Council to construct the new changing rooms.

12. The proposal from St Cadoc's Youth Club is to firstly take responsibility for operating and maintaining the two grass pitches. Thereafter the Club would develop these pitches at their own expense and subject to planning permission seek to build two artificial pitches and associated changing facilities over a period of time. However, this would depend on the Club's ability to raise funds and maintain a sustainable business model.

13. If this proposal were to proceed, St Cadoc's Youth Club would be requested to sign a long term lease agreement to take over and be responsible for all aspects of maintaining and operating the area of the park delineated in the attached plan (Appendix A). The initial proposal regarding the rental for the site is £1 per annum in order that their funds can be directed to the future development of the facility although any decision to offer such a lease at less than market value would require to be justified and evidenced in accordance with the terms of the Disposal of Land By Local Authorities (Scotland) Regulations 2010.

14. Should this proposal be agreed it is intended that the changing room lets at Crookfur Pavilion along with any associated income would be transferred from the Council (currently administered through the Environment Department) to East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust which should help compensate for any potential income stream losses from any other venues that St Cadoc's currently hire from the Trust such as the pitch at Eastwood High School (although this is considered unlikely). It is assumed that the changing rooms will be rented to St Cadoc's for a substantial part of the 25 year lease. As previously stated, the changing rooms have their own separate entrance and operate independently of the other facilities so the proposal would not impact on any other activities within the pavilion.

15. While previously clubs have received funding for the construction of facilities, there is no "payback" to the Council in this instance in that there is not an associated school within these grounds that could benefit from the collaborative use of the new pitches. Therefore any works required would have to be funded by the Club but it would be able to apply for grant funding from bodies such as SportScotland.

16. The property titles of the delineated ground at Crookfur are in the Council's ownership and free from restrictions prohibiting this ground being used for recreational purposes. The area subject to the proposed lease is however considered to be open space and in terms of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1959 any proposed disposal of the land (which such a long term lease would constitute) requires to be publicly advertised in a local paper for a period of at least two weeks. Any objections received to the proposal must be considered before a final decision is made on the proposal.

17. The formation of pitches and associated facilities including parking would require planning permission and it would be for St Cadoc's Youth Club to follow statutory planning procedures in developing this ground. The Club has been advised that the construction of pitches, floodlighting and associated facilities could elicit local objections, and that planning permissions are not guaranteed for this site.

18. St Cadoc's Youth Club has a commitment to inclusivity and the transfer of these pitches would allow it to commence the delivery of its Community Outreach Plan which includes disability football, pre-school football and walking football for the elderly.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

19. The following matters are relevant;

- The current cost of maintaining and preparing these pitches annually is estimated at £13,000.
- The annual income from this pitch is around £4200
- Significantly more income would be generated through the rental of changing rooms to St Cadoc's Youth Club than would have been the case with the Council operating the grass pitches.
- The Council will no longer be required to maintain the grounds within the delineated area.
- There would be no requirement for either capital or revenue Council funding to be granted to St Cadoc's Youth Club

20. Whilst no loss of income to the Trust is anticipated the Council will after 12 months (or earlier if required) review with the Trust any potential reduction of their income from any other facilities which St Cadoc's currently rent from the Trust (such as the pitch at Eastwood High School). Should in the unlikely situation any shortfall in income be demonstrated then the Council will consider compensating the Trust accordingly until such time as other lets can be secured to offset this. The Environment Department would work with the Trust to identify other such potential lets. In addition, at any time during the transition the Environment Department will assist the Trust in finding teams for any voided lets should that situation arise.

CONSULTATION

21. Preliminary discussions have taken place between ERC and St Cadoc's Youth Club at their request and the club has proposed this ground as their preferred venue to develop. Subject to Cabinet approval, further public advertisement of the proposal is required prior to any final decision to grant such a lease.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

22. A number of services have been consulted on this proposal including Strategic Services, Legal, Property and Technical Services, Education Department, the Leisure Trust, Parks and St Cadoc's Youth Club.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

23. The proposal could potentially mean the construction in the long term of two artificial pitches and associated facilities to replace two Council maintained grass pitches. The pitches will require planning permission through which process any negative impact on local residents would have to be considered.

24. There will be limitations on other parts of the building when the football pitches are in use but for the grass pitches this is mainly limited to Saturdays with only the occasional Sunday and midweek lets. It is anticipated that there would be a significant increase in requirement for the changing rooms if and when St Cadoc's construct their first artificial pitch.

25. Hiring out the new changing rooms to St Cadoc's would enhance the income to the Trust particularly when the first artificial pitch is constructed with the facilities likely to be used most weeknights and weekends. The Council would normally only use these for 2-4 lets per weekend. Even should St Cadoc's construct changing rooms of its own for the first artificial pitch, the Club would still require to rent changing rooms for the remaining grass pitch and subsequently beyond that should they create a second artificial pitch.

26. There are no implications in terms of staffing, legal, IT or equalities.

CONCLUSIONS

27. The proposal accords with the Councils' East Renfrewshire Playing Pitch Strategy, Strategy and Action Plan, April 2018.

28. The strategy seeks to;

- Ensure that all valuable facilities are protected for the long-term benefit of sport
- Promote a sustainable approach to the provision of playing pitches and management of sports clubs
- Ensure that there are sufficient facilities in the right place to meet current and projected future demand
- Ensure that all clubs have access to facilities of appropriate quality to meet current needs and longer-term aspirations.

29. The growth of local football teams and the successful recruitment of players, combined with an inflexible attitude of local leagues to playing times and days, leaves the Council unable to meet the demand of all teams. Grass pitches by their nature offer less playing time through condition and natural elements than artificial pitches and also incur more revenue costs in terms of maintenance than artificial pitches. The construction of artificial pitches, and associated facilities, is however a significant capital cost and the Council has diminishing capital reserves available to it and other priorities to consider.

30. There is an opportunity within this proposal to offset revenue costs and to enhance local sports provision through partnership working with a local club. Whilst the Council is purely a letting agent for any artificial pitches in its ownership, a community club such as St Cadoc's can add significant value and improved inclusivity through operating a facility based around their extensive roots within the community.

31. Should the Trust suffer any direct losses through loss of St Cadoc's pitch lets the Council will assist in finding teams and filling these voids.

32. Any development proposal subsequent to a lease being agreed would have to follow the statutory Planning process where required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

33. It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- a) Notes the proposal to grant a 25 year lease of an area of the Crookfur Playing Fields to St Cadoc's Youth Club; and
- b) Requests the Director of Environment to undertake the necessary advertisement process in respect of such a proposal and in due course to bring a further report to Cabinet advising of the terms of any objections received in response to the advertisement.

Director of Environment

Further information can be obtained from: Andrew Corry, Head of Operations on 0141 577 3458 or andrew.corry@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

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Potential Lease at Crookfur Playing Field



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