

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
8 SEPTEMBER 2009**

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**SPORTS PITCHES AT PRIORY FIELDS  
(Director of Environment, Culture and Communities)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 23 June 2009 members of the Panel requested further information regarding the sports pitches at Priory Fields.

**2 SUGGESTED ACTION**

- 2.1 **A specification is now being prepared for Option 4 specifically – cultivation and overseeding as recommended by the Institute of Groundsmanship.**

**The initial estimate is that the cost of this work will be between £10,000 -15,000. This will be confirmed once the specification is finalised and quotes obtained.**

**The intention is for this work to commence in September 2009. The pitches should then be available for full use from September 2010.**

**Some limited use may be possible before this date depending on weather and establishment rate of the new grass.**

**3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Sports Pitches

- 3.1 The field was purchased by Bracknell Forest Council in 2003/04 at a cost of £7,000. The site was acquired to help meet the growing demand for recreational sports pitches in the Borough. Of particular importance is additional football pitches to enable local children to enjoy healthy, active lifestyles.
- 3.2 Funding for this new use was secured through negotiation of developer contributions received as part of planning obligations in accordance with Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The budget was sourced from part of the overall contribution relating to the residential development of Quelm Park.
- 3.3 The total cost for works was £176,000:
- £67,000 has been spent on the pitches
  - £109,000 has been spent on other infrastructure such as parking facilities, gateways, benches, litter bins and fencing
- Construction was completed in 2006.
- 3.4 Following completion of the construction work, an initial establishment period was put in place. This included undertaking some additional fertilising and seeding during spring 2008.
- 3.5 Pitches were subsequently laid out during the 2008/09 football season. This comprised of one senior and two junior football pitches.

### Issues

- 3.6 The condition of these new football pitches was not considered to be of a sufficiently high standard. Of particular concern was the risk of injury to players.
- 3.7 This assessment was based on inspection by the Parks & Countryside Service, alongside trial use by Whitegrove FC (and subsequent reports from the coaches).
- 3.8 Particular issues were:
- i) The grass had not fully established
  - ii) Drainage channel width was excessive
  - iii) The playing surface was uneven and movement was evident
- 3.9 It was unclear why the pitches were not suitable for play. Potential contributing factors included ground conditions, specification of works, materials used, construction, and / or and maintenance.
- 3.10 Advice from Council Engineers was that the specification and construction was based on previously successful schemes and sound technical guidance. The lead contractor had been successfully used on previous projects and it was considered that works were carried out to the correct standards.

### Assessment

- 3.11 The Parks & Countryside Service brought in independent specialist advice to help clarify the problems regarding the condition of new sports grass / pitches and to identify positive actions to bring the site into full use.
- 3.12 The Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) were commissioned to undertake this work in early 2009. A written report was submitted in June 2009; produced following on site survey work.
- 3.13 The main findings indicate that:
- The upper 10cm of the playing surface is weak and likely to result in loss of player traction
  - There is a compacted layer at 20 - 25 cm within the profile, contributing to movement of the upper profile (caused by factors such as machinery traffic during instillation, type of aeration equipment used, change in soil type and / or structure)
  - A layer of soil has formed a cap over the sand backfill restricting movement of surface water into the intended drain and also holding water (caused by factors such as machinery operations on the site, foot traffic, heavy rainfall)
  - The type of sand used for the bands, and the limited depth that this extends is contributing to a restriction in the movement of water into the drains
  - Soil contamination within the stone layer is restricting the ability of surface water to move through to the lateral drains
  - The type and depth of sand / soil mix has contributed to a weak sward (grass) that is not able to withstand drought or wear stress
  - The levels over many of the sand bands are uneven resulting in reduced traction and trip hazards (caused by limited soil water, low nutrient availability, grass type)

- The natural soil type has low nutrient value for active plant growth. The introduction of sand has further contributed to weak grass growth
- 3.14 In general terms; despite adopting a nationally recommended, tried and tested model; the specification and materials used have subsequently proven to not be appropriate for the specific ground conditions.
- 3.15 The assessment that the IOG carried out supports the decision to restrict use of the site and confirms that the surface of the pitches is currently not suitable for play.
- 3.16 Although it is highly frustrating that the pitches are not yet in use, the decision has been correct in avoiding injury to players.

#### Recommended Remedial Works

- 3.17 The IOG Report identified 4 potential solutions to bring the pitches up to the required standard:
1. Removal of the installed system
  2. Cover the entire site with a new soil layer
  3. Top dress the site and over-seed
  4. Cultivation and over-seed

Option 4 was identified within the Report as the most realistic proposal in terms of renovation cost and ongoing maintenance requirements.

#### Background Papers

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