



ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Adur Cabinet Member for Finance and
Resources and the Worthing Cabinet
Member for Resources
JAW/012/22-23
11th January 2023

Decision to be taken on or after the
19th January 2023

Key Decision [Yes/No]

Ward(s) Affected: St Nicolas Ward

The Meads

Report by the Director for the Economy

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to determine how best to improve that area of The Meads Recreation Ground leased by Adur District Council to West Sussex County Council and used by Swiss Gardens Primary School for sports and play.
- 1.2. The intention is to enhance the role this space fulfils as an important recreation and play space for Swiss Gardens Primary School and the wider local community.
- 1.3. The decision resulting from this report will directly inform how West Sussex County Council uses Section 106 monies set aside for the purpose of extra demands for education services at Swiss Gardens Primary School.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Members are requested to authorise the following proposals:-

2.1 Mindful of the particular benefit that a hybrid solution offers in terms of extending the opportunities for sports and recreation activity, officers recommend that Adur District Council (ADC) in its capacity as landowner supports West Sussex County Council (WSCC) in such manner as is required, to procure for (and enter into a contract for) the delivery of a hybrid pitch solution for the area of land at The Meads, leased to WSCC by ADC for use by Swiss Gardens Primary School;

2.2 Prior to the procurement, the Director for the Economy shall negotiate the terms of a Service Level Agreement between ADC, WSCC and the Meads School, which shall agree terms for:-

- The funding arrangements between WSCC, the Council (and the Meads as appropriate) including the costs of procuring; planning permission as required; the build of the pitch; ongoing maintenance and management of the facility.
- Project managing delivery of the hybrid facility by ADC; a process for agreeing delivery of the project and the final design prior to installation, as well as the responsibilities for maintaining the facility during its lifetime;
- Terms for ensuring that the facility and/or the leased land remains open and available for use by members of the public at all other times in accordance with the lease agreement;
- That WSCC shall support the Swiss Gardens Primary School and the Friends of the Meads establish an 'oversight Group' together with the District Council Ranger team and the Allotment Society to share information and sponsor joint initiatives that enhance the enjoyment of The Meads for the School, residents and visitors.
- Any other terms reasonably required for the delivery of the project to be agreed between WSCC and ADC.

3. Background

3.1. The Meads Recreation Ground is an important open space owned by Adur District Council: it serves a variety of activities and is highly valued by the local community in this part of Shoreham, close to the town centre where there are only very limited amounts of open space available for sports and play.

- 3.2. Part of The Meads adjacent to Swiss Gardens Primary School is leased to West Sussex County Council for use during the school day (9am to 4.30pm). This arrangement reflects an agreement between Adur District Council and West Sussex County Council formalised in 2009 and which acknowledged the impact of a significant increase in school pupil numbers when the former Swiss Gardens Infant School was expanded to become Swiss Gardens Primary School at the time of school reorganisation.
- 3.3. Whilst the lease arrangement has been successful, it has been recognised that in a relatively small space (by comparison with many other schools) and partly as a result of the intensity of activity, standing water, compacted ground and the resultant unevenness of surfaces have presented a real challenge to ensuring an available space for safe sports and play for as much of the school year as possible.
- 3.4. The development at Ropetackle North yielded the prospect of additional funding for Swiss Gardens Primary School and a Section 106 Planning Obligation was signed with the developer (Hyde Homes Ltd) that secured:
- 'The sum of £247,960 to accommodate the extra demands for education services at Swiss Gardens Primary School (Swiss Gardens, Shoreham by Sea, West Sussex).'***
- 3.5. Following discussions between representatives of the School, officers of ADC and officers of WSCC, it was established that the principal use of the Section 106 monies should be directed toward an upgrade of the leased area of open space to extend its use, improve its condition and provide a safer environment for sports and play.
- 3.6. A Feasibility Study was carried out on behalf of the District Council as landowner in 2020 and this established the prospect of 3 options:
- Option 1 - Natural improved turf grass supported by a new drainage system*
- Option 2 - 3G artificial grass pitch including a new drainage system*
- Option 3 - 3G artificial grass pitch including a new drainage system and floodlighting*
- 3.7. In February 2021, ADC undertook a consultation exercise to test these options and understand where wider improvements to The Meads could be made. The results of the consultation (Appendix 1)

underlined just how much The Meads is valued by local people and highlighted a number of areas for improvement including the planting of trees and other initiatives to support local biodiversity.

- 3.8. With regard to the leased area options the consultation showed the area was used by 59.5% of respondents. When all responses were taken into account almost two thirds of respondents (62.8%) preferred a natural improved turf grass supported by a new drainage system as a way forward for this area. A quarter (25.6%) preferred Option 2 - 3G artificial grass pitch including a new drainage system and 1 in 10 (11.6%) Option 3 with additional floodlights.
- 3.9. Attendees at the School Sessions expressed a clear preference for Option 2 - 3G artificial grass pitch including a new drainage system with 68.2% supporting this option including the School leadership team who expressed strong support for the 3G option, albeit not necessarily floodlighted.
- 3.10. Following the consultation exercise, the view was expressed by District councillors representatives that an improved grass solution should be pursued.
- 3.11. At this point, it is important to acknowledge that there have been genuine and at times, passionate differences in views and opinions on the best solution; in particular, between those hoping for a 3G artificial surface to maximise opportunities for sport and play for the School; and those seeking a natural grass solution in the context of wider environmental improvements at The Meads.
- 3.12. During this period, the Friends of the Meads Group has been established and has worked closely with the District Council's Ranger service on improvements to the Meads including planting new shrubs and trees.
- 3.13. Understandably, the options for the leased area have been the subject of considerable debate including questions at a meeting of Adur District Council (7th April 2022), and as one might expect, genuine expressions of concern and frustration.
- 3.14. A further factor that has arisen, given the passage of time, is a concern about the affordability of the 3G solution in particular, within the financial envelope available.

4. A way forward

- 4.1. At the The County Local Committee Forum on 9th June 2022 held at Shoreham Library, a series of questions were raised expressing concern that a solution had not been found and seeking an update on progress from the District Council and the County Council.
- 4.2. At the CLF representatives of the School raised the prospect of an alternative, hybrid solution comprising mainly grass, but with an artificial component which together might provide for greater intensity of use and extend the active 'season' during which the leased space could be used.
- 4.3. It was agreed at the Meeting that the hybrid solution would be explored as well as the prospect of a rye grass solution to help inform a decision. Whilst this report necessarily focuses on the existing leased area, it was also suggested that the School might consider whether any other space could be utilised for sports and play, mindful of the concerns expressed at the meeting about the 'space available per pupil' by comparison with other local schools.
- 4.4. Hybrids are a relatively new development and the longer term benefits/disbenefits are challenging to determine. This report does not attempt to provide a definitive scientific analysis, but rather reflects on some of the key factors to help inform the way forward.
- 4.5. It is also the case that there are a range of hybrid solutions on offer. Mindful of the concerns expressed as part of the consultation process for The Meads, this assessment has focused on solutions which offer the prospect of higher levels of natural grass. Assessment of different options indicates that provision of a hybrid which comprises up to 97% natural grass is a realistic prospect.
- 4.6. Hybrid pitches rely on a carpet backing interwoven with synthetic fibres between which natural grass is sown and grows. The intention is that the root system of the natural grass passes through the carpet to provide stability, whilst the synthetic grass protects the natural grass as it grows and during use.
- 4.7. The principal advantage of a hybrid solution at The Meads is an extension of the period during which the facility can be used for sports and play. Experience from locations such as a hybrid pitch installed at Regent's Park (referenced below) illustrates how over a 3 year period, a hybrid solution met and exceeded a target of 25 hours of activity

each week and did not succumb to damage from dips and holes as a result of instability.

- 4.8. Clearly, there is a significant element of synthetic fibre in any hybrid solution and this has to be factored into an assessment of the wider impact. By combining natural and synthetic grasses, it is, however, very likely that the lifespan of the synthetic element is extended well beyond the traditional duration of a 3G pitch before it needs replacement. A hybrid does however, need a careful management regime and this needs to be factored into capital expenditure at the outset and in an allowance for on-going revenue budgeting. With any hybrid solution, irrigation is necessary to retain the natural grass and spiking continues to be required to manage surface hardness. Discussion with suppliers confirms that an underground water tank for irrigation will be needed to support a hybrid solution, accompanied by a small 'pump house' facility on the School campus and an appropriate mower and mowing regime.
- 4.9. Perenne Ryegrass is a hardwearing alternative option comprising entirely natural grass. Sport England's Design Guidance Note, 'Natural Turf in Sport' recommends its use but advises that the maximum use by under 15s without detriment to the grass would be 4.5-9 hours per week. This period of activity is not consistent with the current usage by the School and the 'additional hours' have resulted in detriment to the quality of the surface including pooling of water and necessary mitigation.
- 4.10. The best 'side by side' comparison that can be found remains the Regent's Park example referred to above which is now in its fifth year of evaluation (report referenced below). Over the first four years, the hybrid pitch has had no cancellations over this period, whilst the rye grass pitch has had over thirty cancellations as a result of the surface being deemed unplayable.

5. Issues for consideration

- 5.1. The key issue for consideration is whether a hybrid solution can offer a solution to the challenge of offering more available time for sports, play and recreation for the School and the local community it serves.
- 5.2. Alongside the main consideration is the question of whether a suitable hybrid solution can be delivered within the available budget that

resolves the majority of the concerns expressed by those both 'for' and 'against' wholly artificial and wholly grassed options.

- 5.3. The hybrid solution does require an adaptation to the more typical maintenance regime for grassed areas and this needs to be taken into account in any procurement exercise.
- 5.4. A hybrid solution also needs to be considered in terms of its environmental impact and in particular, by comparison with the wholly artificial solution and the grass alternative.
- 5.5. Any hybrid solution should not impact adversely on the wider Meads and mindful of the key issue of drainage, should deliver a significant improvement on the current position.

6. Engagement and Communication

- 6.1. The key consultation exercise is outlined in the text above. There have been a series of meetings between ADC and WSCC officers and the School leadership team. The Friends of the Meads will be an important consultee going forward.
- 6.2. The key meeting where views were expressed that have led to the drafting of this report was the County Local Forum on 9th June 2022.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. The scheme will be procured and paid for by the County Council. The District Council will provide project management to oversee installation. Ongoing maintenance will be provided by the District Council within existing budgets.
- 7.2. Discussions with potential suppliers indicate that both a hybrid solution and a rye grass solution are likely to be delivered within the available Section 106 funds that are available. This would however, need to be confirmed via a formal procurement exercise.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1. Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.

- 8.2. s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation.
- 8.3. Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 8.4. s1 Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 confers the power on a Council to enter into a contract for the provision of making available assets or services for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the Council.
- 8.5. When entering into a public contract, the authority is required to comply with its Contract Standing Orders and where applicable the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

Background Papers

People Spaces Places - The Meads Recreation Ground Consultation Report
February 2021.

Sport England - Design Guidance Note Updated & Combined guidance Creating sporting opportunities in every community; 2011.

Carpet-Hybrid Pitches in the Community Sport England Year 3 Project Update Dr Richard Earl Principal Consultant, TGMS / PSD - 12/2021.

Minutes of the County Local Forum held at Shoreham Library, 9th June 2022.

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

Compared with a wholly artificial solution, a hybrid solution with a major element of real grass represents a better position from an environmental perspective. Nevertheless, any hybrid solution will include an element of artificial grass woven into an artificial 'carpet' and particular attention will have to be paid to ensuring that at its 'end of life', the artificial elements are disposed of in an environmentally responsible manner. It is important to record that a wholly grass solution represents the better environmental option of the 3 possibilities.

1. Economic

None identified.

2. Social

2.1 Social Value

The prospect of extending the period that School pupils can play and participate in sports over the period of a school term represents a significant social benefit. Extending the period over which the leased land will be available for recreation will also have a wider benefit for the local community outside of School hours.

2.2 Equality Issues

Extending the time period over which the leased area of land can be used offers the potential for greater participation and greater access by members of the local community.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

Extending the period during which the leased land can be utilised offers the potential to support initiatives to support community safety.

2.4 Human Rights Issues

None identified.

3. Environmental

The environmental implications of a hybrid solution compare favourably with a wholly artificial solution, but do not offer the environmental benefits of a 100% grassed solution. Particular attention will need to be paid to the maintenance and ultimately, disposal of the artificial elements. Irrigation will be important and the use of greywater will need to be addressed as part of the procurement process.

4. Governance

The recommendations set out in this report highlight the importance of the statutory bodies and the local community working in partnership.