

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

9 September 2021

Report by Director of Environment

CROOKFUR PLAYING FIELDS – LEASE BY ST CADOC’S YOUTH CLUB UPDATE

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To update members on the current position regarding the proposed lease of football pitches at Crookfur Playing Fields to St Cadoc’s Youth Club.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that cabinet note:
- a) that no further work is required on this matter as both the Council and St Cadoc’s Youth Club agree that this site cannot achieve many of the longer term aims of the club;
  - b) that although the proposal has not yet been advertised there has been a significant level of correspondence objecting to the proposed lease; and
  - c) that the Council and relevant partners will work with St Cadoc’s and other sports clubs to try to identify appropriate and acceptable sites for the betterment of sporting facilities within the area.

**BACKGROUND**

3. The Cabinet in March 2021 considered a report concerning a proposal from St Cadoc’s Youth club to lease and take responsibility for operating and maintaining the two grass pitches at Crookfur. Thereafter, the club would develop these pitches at its own expense and subject to planning permission seek to build two artificial pitches and associated changing facilities over time. However, this would be dependent on the club’s ability to raise funds and develop a sustainable business model. The exact details of the proposal were not available.

4. The Cabinet:
- Noted the proposal to grant a 25-year lease of an area of the Crookfur Playing Fields to St Cadoc’s Youth Club; and
  - Requested 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.

5. The intention had been to advertise the proposal in late Spring when it was hoped resources would be available to undertake the consultation. However, due to the workload associated with Coronavirus, resources have not been available within senior management in the Environment Department who have been focusing on Coronavirus issues such as setting up and running test centres and vaccination centres as well as operating essential services such as waste disposal during a period of restrictions on working practices and staff shortages.

6. In addition the intention had also been to work with the club to confirm their proposals prior to the consultation to ensure any proposals would be acceptable to the Council in terms of the lease. This was not progressed to any significant extent again due to the impact of Coronavirus.

## **REPORT**

7. Although the advertisement and consultation on the lease had not begun the previous Cabinet report elicited a significant volume of correspondence from members of the public and considerable debate on social media.

8. It has been particularly difficult for Council staff to respond to the correspondence as the Council were unable to commence detailed lease discussions with St Cadoc's Youth Club

9. The main concerns which have been expressed are around the perceived extent of the development proposed by St Cadoc's Youth Club and the impact it would have on users of the park. Issues include the potential for senior football matches, paid-for admission games, further car parking, viewing structures/stands/terracing and restrictions on park users.

10. On the other hand, there is clear support from many of the families of the young people who are members of St Cadoc's Youth Club who are keen to see better facilities made available.

11. The correspondence and social media exchanges has highlighted that the original proposal and the status quo each have benefits to East Renfrewshire residents.

12. The original proposal by St Cadoc's Youth Club would have significantly increased the all-weather sports pitches available to children and young people for football and other sports. St Cadoc's Youth Club is a registered charity and includes many East Renfrewshire young people in its membership. Therefore there were no commercial issues to consider and St Cadoc's Youth Club advised they intended to use the facilities to provide additional opportunities for disadvantaged young people. There were therefore many community benefits associated with the proposal.

13. As the Cabinet will be aware the Council is supportive of community sports clubs, recognises the major benefits they provide and has already supported a number of youth football teams. All bring considerable benefits to the area and the work of their volunteers is exceptional.

14. The status quo of retaining the 2 grass pitches also brings benefits in that when the pitches are not being used for sports they are accessible to local residents for informal sports and exercise. Residents have always valued green space but as a result of the pandemic many residents have explored more green space in their local areas and have

used it more frequently. As a Council we would wish to encourage this now and in the future since it brings considerable benefits in terms of health and well-being.

15. As an example the new nursery which has replaced the old Crookfur Pavilion has increased the attractiveness of the area and may well be encouraging more families to use Crookfur Playing fields.

16. The Club have recently advised the Council that they understand the concerns expressed over further sports development near to residential properties and the need to protect open green space. The Club have made clear that they wish to work with and not in any way alienate local communities and/or neighbours.

17. Taking into account all of the current circumstances both parties agree that on balance a more positive alternative option would be for the Club and the Council to work together to try to identify a more appropriate and acceptable site better suited to allow the Club to realise its vision, ambitions and future expansion plans.

18. No further work is required on this matter in relation to Crookfur Park as both the Council and St Cadoc's Youth Club agree that this site cannot achieve many of the longer term aims of the Club.

19. The pitches would as a result be retained and operated by the Council as grass football pitches. There would be no impact on existing uses of the park. Discussions have been underway for some time with East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust (ERCLT) about operating all pitches on behalf of the Council. If these discussions progress positively then this will remove the opportunity for further approaches from other organisations. ERCLT is a wholly owned subsidiary of East Renfrewshire Council and the ownership of the pitches would stay with the Council.

20. This matter has drawn attention to the importance of community-based-sports clubs with ambitions for expansion and the lack of availability of affordable and suitable land to allow them to do so. However, it has also highlighted the importance of protecting Protected Urban Greenspace for public use, particularly given Covid. The Council's Local Development Plan 3 will therefore need to consider the potential for supporting this type of demand/development for community based sports clubs outwith Protected Urban Greenspace areas and if possible away from existing residential development. This will require the development of a sporting facilities strategy to be inclusive to all clubs in the area and the ever growing demand for football pitches and other training facilities.

## **FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY**

21. There are no financial implications for the Council.

## **CONSULTATION/ PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

22. There are no consultation/partnership working issues.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS**

23. There are no implications in terms of staffing, legal, IT or equalities issues at this point in time other than excessive demands upon officer time in dealing with the matter.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

24. It is recommended that cabinet note:

- a) that no further work is required on this matter as both the Council and St Cadoc's Youth Club agree that this site cannot achieve many of the longer term aims of the club;
- b) that although the proposal has not yet been advertised there has been a significant level of correspondence objecting to the proposed lease; and
- c) that the Council and relevant partners will work with St Cadoc's and other sports clubs to try to identify appropriate and acceptable sites for the betterment of sporting facilities within the area

Andrew Cahill  
Director of Environment

For further information contact Andrew Cahill, Director of Environment  
[Andrew.cahill@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto:Andrew.cahill@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

Convener contact details

Councillor Tony Buchanan  
(Leader of the Council)

Office: 0141 577 3107  
Mobile: 07976 360398

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