

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: NATIONAL AND REGIONAL FACILITIES STRATEGY
Meeting: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
Date: 8th APRIL 2008
Author: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members approval not to proceed with the development of the Indoor Football Academy, which received in principle funding support of £3,000,000 from **sportscotland**, in August 2004. The report recommends that officers develop proposals for a network of third generation synthetic football pitches and upgrades to existing grass pitches across the area.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Six local authorities across Scotland were allocated awards to provide regional and nationally significant sports facilities. Not all Authorities have been able to proceed with their plans due to both the Capital and Revenue implications of the schemes originally planned, together with updated schemes having been developed and viewed as being more relevant now. It should be noted that no provision has been made for the provision of the Indoor Centre in the Council's Capital Programme.
- 2.2 Detailed planning permission for the development of the centre on a site adjacent to Falkirk Stadium was granted in 2006 and since then further work has been carried out in developing a business model that would ensure Best Value is delivered to the Council from the project.
- 2.3 At the same time, review discussions with **sportscotland** and the SFA have concluded a greater need for a network of quality third generation synthetic football pitches, similar to that provided at Stenhousemuir Football Club, across the area rather than a single centrally located centre. Initial considerations would indicate a network of four pitches, recognising that there is already one provided at Stenhousemuir Football Club.

3 FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 Football tends to transcend traditional sporting structures and is for many people part of their cultural psyche. It is therefore one of the most effective ways of engaging people in activity providing both a social and sporting outlet for many who otherwise may not participate. Football as an 'industry' has recognised this universal appeal and in recent years has widened contact with the broader community than the traditional club supporter.
- 3.2 The cultural and social values of being associated with football success are widely felt in communities. For example, Falkirk Football Club has traditionally been one of the best supported provincial clubs in Scotland and also delivers a strong community programme of events and training activities.
- 3.3 Sustainable and significant strides forward are being made in the development of football throughout the Falkirk Council area. Structured partnership initiatives between the Council, the Scottish Football Association, Falkirk Football Club, Stenhousemuir Football Club and other Senior and Junior Clubs throughout the area, have seen the development of the game progressing at an unprecedented pace at a local level.
- 3.4 The challenge now is how to continue to grow and maintain this momentum ensuring individual talent is channelled and nurtured and opportunities to meet and compete at all levels do not stagnate. Doing this well requires a level of investment and commitment to training and development. Good coaching and attractive playing conditions are the key to attracting and retaining the less well motivated participant as well as developing the talented.
- 3.5 The significant improvements seen in recent years include:
- Grassroots players and volunteers of all ages and abilities being recruited, retained and developed;
 - The coaching and playing standards within grassroots football being raised significantly;
 - Clear player pathways between the youth and adult recreational game being encouraged; and
 - Improved links between the youth and senior game are now developing more significantly allowing a clear player pathway for talented developers.
- 3.6 The provision of the indoor purpose built centre that was proposed via the National Regional Facilities initiative through support funding from **sportscotland** was considered to be an opportunity which, if developed, would deliver an extremely valuable, high quality, facility that would allow the Falkirk area to continue the increase in capacity and standards of football provision over the coming years.
- 3.7 However, recent discussions with clubs, sportscotland and the SFA have suggested that a more appropriate development would be through the provision of a network of quality third generation synthetic pitches across the area which would support the playing and training needs of various clubs, rather than the one indoor centre provision.

- 3.8 It should be noted however that the grant of £3,000,000 from **sportscotland** would not transfer to any new proposal and a new application for funding support would require to be made.

4 INDOOR CENTRE

- 4.1 The concept of the indoor football academy was to function as the developmental hub that, associated with the professional game, would provide the inspiration and conditions to encourage participation and develop excellence.
- 4.2 The proposal was to create an indoor training centre that would be part of a campus of sports facilities provided by the Council across the area, offering a comprehensive range of services primarily to football and rugby players of all levels.
- 4.3 The Outline Business Case developed for the centre suggested that the capital cost could be around £8m, requiring £5m from the Council's Capital Programme. As noted in paragraph 2.1 no provision was ever made in the Capital Programme. In addition to the Capital funding requirement the facility was estimated to have annual running costs of c£0.26m. In terms of resource requirements, Officers feel that the development priorities at this time would be best serviced by an alternative approach.
- 4.4 Since the concept of building an indoor football centre was considered, recognition has to be given to the context of the changing priorities for sport and for football locally. For the reasons above it is recognised that the provision of an indoor centre is no longer the main football development priority for the area.

5 CURRENT PITCH PROVISION

- 5.1 The Council currently operates over one hundred grass football pitches across the area. The majority of the pitches are over played through the staging of both training and matches on them on a weekly basis, with some pitches required to accommodate more than one team. With the ever increasingly wet autumn and winter periods, the pitches are now experiencing an unprecedented level of wear on pitches unsuitable to be used during wet periods. The majority of football pitches across the area were not specifically developed and designed as sports pitches meaning drainage systems and the topography of the pitches are not ideal on a significant number. A significant number of these pitches are marked out in public parks or on areas of amenity open space.
- 5.2 In addition, a number of full-size multi-synthetic surfaced pitches are/will be located at Secondary Schools. These pitches, although useful for certain levels of recreational football and other sports activities, only offer a limited level of use for the more serious football development activity as they are multi-sport function.
- 5.3 It is suggested that future focus be on the delivery of third generation pitches and upgrade of existing grass pitches

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The original proposal to develop the Indoor Football Academy was established through a need identified regionally for an indoor facility to complement the outdoor football pitch provision across the area.
- 6.2 Since then however, the level of demand for access to quality football pitches and the ever increasing wet autumn/winter periods has seen a significant deterioration in the quality of the playing surfaces across the area.
- 6.3 Having considered this current position, it is recommended that a more appropriate proposal at this time would be for a plan for a network of third generation synthetic football pitches and upgrades to existing grass pitches, to provide enhanced playing and training pitches for football in a number of communities and not to proceed with the development of an indoor centre. It is unlikely that significant external funds will be available for this purpose and that a long term incremental approach will be needed.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that Members:-

- a) **Agree not to proceed with the Indoor Football Academy;**
- b) **Request Officers to continue engagement with the SFA, sportscotland, and local clubs with a view to developing a plan for a network of third generation synthetic pitches and upgraded grass pitches across the area together with detailed budget considerations and to report to Education and Leisure Committee in due course.**

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Director of Community Services

Date: 20th March 2008

Contact Officer: Tom Leighton, The Falkirk Stadium, extn 0904

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Lottery Application, April 2004

Anyone person wishing to inspect the background paper listed above should telephone 01324 590904 and ask for Tom Leighton.