
COMMUNITY SPORTS FACILITIES GRANT PROPOSAL - SOHAM

Committee: Operational Services Committee

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[X59]

1. ISSUE

- 1.1 To consider a grant recommendation under the Community Sports Facilities Grants programme.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Members are recommended to approve a grant of £179,500 to Ross Peers Sports Centre as set out in 4.1.1

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The built leisure facility stock in East Cambridgeshire comprises the Hive (owned by ECDC and operated by GLL) and a number of older centres operated by local trusts and academies, which are self-financing, with user charges roughly covering their normal operating costs. The centres have historically received advisory support and modest grants from ECDC to support capital improvements, and develop their services.
- 3.2 The overall budget for such grants has – until this year - been £32,000 per annum, and this has necessarily limited the scope of potential projects. The new Community Sports Facilities grant programme is budgeted at up to £300,000 over a three-year period (to March 2025). The expansion in funding opens up the scope of the scheme, and presents an opportunity to upgrade facilities and develop services to meet contemporary standards.
- 3.3 The balance to be struck between responding to new opportunities, and addressing immediate issues, is however likely to vary between the centres and over time. As previously noted, most of the sites in East Cambridgeshire are dated, with associated liabilities for repairs and refurbishments – roofs, plant and internal finishes being among the most obvious. It is also clear that in general, business levels have not yet recovered to those before the pandemic; typical recovery rates appear to be around 75%, and the leisure sector as a whole remains financially stressed; it is perhaps fortunate that none of the free-standing trusts has a swimming pool, with the associated energy costs. It is therefore likely that some of the trusts will need support in re-balancing their operations over the next year or two. Officers therefore believe that some

pragmatism may be required in supporting the trusts, while not defaulting purely to reactive repairs and maintenance. It is hoped that the focus of projects will over time shift to investments with long-term added value.

- 3.4 From discussions with the trusts over the summer, two proposals have been received in time for consideration by this Committee, and for reasons of process are being presented separately.

4. ARGUMENTS

- 4.1 **Proposal:** Full replacement of sports hall roof, Ross Peers Sports Centre

Anticipated Cost

Works as estimated (including VAT & contingency) £224,500

Cost based on a recent detailed estimate but would need to be firmly established prior to confirmation of any award. VAT is effectively irrecoverable, as much of the Centre's income is VAT-exempt. A contingency provision is also included to allow for unforeseen issues, and control mechanisms would be required to ensure that this is appropriately used.

Prior condition survey £3,300

Actual cost for a condition survey commissioned by the Trustees on officer recommendation, to identify any latent structural issues beyond those known. This is briefly discussed further below.

Total Project Costs £227,800

Partnership Funding Sought £48,300

A parallel application is in train to the Amey Community Fund. The outcome of this application – and the value of any award - may be known by the time the Committee meets, but this is not yet certain. This figure also includes costs incurred by the Trust on the condition survey as noted above.

Grant recommended £179,500

4.2 Comments

- 4.2.1 There remain some uncertainties in the figures, including the final price, works contingencies and partnership funding. So far as reasonably practical, these uncertainties have been reflected in the award recommendation. If the project proves not to be deliverable within this financial envelope, officers would propose to review the scope of the project with the Trustees and seek further guidance if necessary.
- 4.2.2 Estimates have been received both for outright replacement of the roof (stripping off and re-covering) and for overcladding, leaving the existing

asbestos cement covering in place. Officers believe that while outright replacement is more expensive, that cost is likely to carry more certainty than that for over-cladding, which would involve working with the existing structure and carry a number of project risks. It is also believed that outright replacement offers a more certain long-term outcome. The recommendation has been formulated accordingly.

- 4.2.3 Most areas of the centre are tired, but the roof is a particular problem as leaks are affecting use of the sports hall on a day-to-day basis. The sports hall is the largest single income generator, so disruption or loss of bookings poses a material threat to the future of the operation. Taking seasonal factors also into account, the works are considered urgent, and this has been a major consideration in the timing of this report and the approach recommended.
- 4.2.4 The Trust is aware of the need to identify partnership funding, but the Centre remains in deficit on its day-to-day operations (a legacy of the pandemic), and the Trust is therefore not currently in a position to commit significant capital sums. The Trustees have committed £3,300 to the prior condition survey, and officers propose that this should be considered in lieu of any further financial contribution. The Trust has also made an application to the Amey Community Fund, which would complement this proposal. The outcome of the application is not known at this stage (parallel funding applications often give rise to a slightly circular process, as each prospective funder waits for confirmation of the others), but it is thought that the bid is a credible one. Typical previous awards for sports capital projects have been up to around £30,000, but the fund has the capacity for higher awards and this is a somewhat larger project than most. Allowing for the requirement for 11% partnership funding (which effectively offsets against the nominal award value), a net contribution of £45,000 would appear a reasonable target, and the award recommendation here reflects this assumption.
- 4.2.5 Recognising the need to place this project in a more long-term context, a general condition survey has been commissioned by the Trust to identify and cost (approximations only at this stage) any further works which may be required. Most of the works identified appear relatively minor, and there is no evidence for further major liabilities; the roof therefore stands out both in urgency and financial scale, but the survey provides the basis for a five-year programme, which should also include replacing the sports hall floor and re-surfacing the outdoor pitch. Officers will discuss this further with the Trustees, but for the reasons given above (4.2.3) it would be preferable to progress the work with the roof at this stage.
- 4.2.6 In this context, and given the scale of investment under consideration, it is also proposed that a wider business review should be commissioned, to help the centre complete the recovery of the business following the pandemic and to identify future needs and opportunities for long-term planning. This would be explored further by officers in consultation with the Trustees.

5 **RECOMMENDATION**

- 5.1 Members are recommended to approve a grant of £179,500 to Ross Peers Sports Centre as set out in 4.1.

6 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS / EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT / CARBON IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1 The proposed funding allocations fall within the existing budget.
- 6.2 No equalities implications follow from these proposals.
- 6.3 There are no direct positive or negative carbon impact implications for ECDC.

Background Documents

None

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