

Title of Report: Update Report on Request for Spectator Stand at Melvin Arena Pitch	Officer Presenting: Director of Health and Community Author: Head of Community Development & Leisure and Head of Capital Development & Building Control
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 To update Members on the options available for works required at Melvin Arena to ensure compliance with the IFA's Championship/Premier Intermediate League Criteria.

2 Background

- 2.1 Members will be aware that a motion was proposed at the Council meeting on the 24th January 2019 regarding Strabane Athletic and the works required to ensure Melvin Arena in Strabane is compliant as an IFA Championship/Premier Intermediate League standard ground for the 19/20 season.
- 2.2 The existing Melvin Arena is situated approximately 300m southeast of the Melvin Sports Centre. The arena consists of a natural grass pitch surrounded by an athletic running track, and various other athletics throwing and jumping facilities.
- 2.3 The Arena was built in 1976 and it was primarily developed as an athletics facility. The 1976 work was undertaken by Enterprise Ulster and consisted of a cinder running track. The running track was upgraded to a polymeric surface and throwing areas added around 2007/2008, at a cost of approximately £160k. It is understood that the grass pitch was refurbished around 2003/03. Further significant improvement works were carried out to the pitch in April 2010.
- 2.4 Modular changing facilities were constructed in 2017 comprising 2 team changing rooms and a referee changing room within a fenced enclosure.

- 2.5 Members will be aware that there is presently a Council approved, fully funded scheme for the long term redevelopment of the Melvin site that will ensure compliance with the IFA's Championship/Premier Intermediate League Criteria. Council have recently appointed an Integrated Design Team to take this project forward. In addition, there is a Project Steering Group set up that meets up on a monthly basis. Membership of this group consists of all user groups at Melvin, Residents, Council Officers and Elected Members. This has been agreed as the forum for user groups to identify their proposal and identify their facility needs. Also it is a forum where local residents can raise any concerns and issues they may have with the development and these can be brought through Project Board structures.
- 2.6 Any long-term and interim proposals must meet the requirements of the current edition of the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds and any safety issues must be suitably managed by the football club when the ground is occupied by spectators. Where segregation of spectators is required by current IFA criteria then further consideration will need to be given as to how this can be achieved.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 Discussions have taken place with the Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) who are responsible for licensing the ground for the IFA Premier Intermediate League. The option of a semi-permanent spectator stand may be considered if it was to be in position for the entire season. However, on the option of using movable demountable, spectator accommodation, the initial feedback was one of caution.

- 3.2 NIFL have concerns over the value of an inspection of the grounds in April if the stand provision were to be removed after each game. They have also queried the Health and Safety implications of using such a moveable, demountable stand and who would be responsible for certifying the safety of the stand each time it is re-erected. In addition, NIFL have concerns that by approving the use of such a semi-permanent structure (i.e. a moveable, demountable spectator stand) at Melvin, this would set a precedence for other clubs to attempt to gain compliance with NIFL's stadia criteria by providing semi-permanent facilities. Based on this feedback from NIFL, the moving of a demountable stand in and out for games cannot be guaranteed for approval. A quote from a supplier of such moveable infrastructure, suggested to officers by one of the project stakeholders, has indicated a one off hire charge of approximately £15,000, followed by a recurring charge of £5,000 each time they would take the facility down and £5,000 to put it back up again. This would result in a cost of £215,000 to Council over the course of a 20 game season. The ferry costs of delivering and returning the equipment to GB would have been added to this figure. Council are currently in communication with this supplier to explore the possibility of council officers being trained to undertake the erection and dismantling of the company's equipment and if so, what the residual recurring cost per use would be.
- 3.3 Preliminary discussions have been held with senior Planning officers and they have provided the following advice based on the limited information currently available to them on this suggested proposal:
- If the moveable demountable stand were to stay permanently in place for the duration of the football season, the Permitted Development Regulations would not provide grounds for exempting the stand from needing planning permission.
 - If the moveable demountable stand were to be erected and dismantled for every game and removed off site between games, then the stand would not require planning permission.
 - Based on the requirement for a 500 spectator capacity ground, approximately 180 car parking spaces and one bus parking space would be required. A very preliminary assessment of the existing space available between the stadium and the adjoining public road would indicate it might be possible to create 80 car parking spaces.

- An assessment of the stadia criteria for this league would indicate that the existing combined player and referee changing cabin on site will need replaced as the internal spaces are slightly smaller than the required regulation sizes. Provided the new cabin is less than 200 cubic metre in volume and not higher than 4 metres, then they may comply with the Permitted Development Regulations. Current NIFL criteria requires a 15 sq metre floor space for changing rooms. Based on 11-a-side changing units installed at other sites, any new cabin at Melvin might exceed these limits.

3.4 The Capital Development team in conjunction with Officers in Health and Community and NIFL have identified the main item of works required at the existing stadium (in addition to the main spectator stand) in order to ensure compliance with IFA Championship/Premier Intermediate League Criteria. These are listed below:

- Safety improvements to existing uncovered terracing
- Create safe access and parking for referee and players
- New player and referee changing facilities
- Male, female and disabled spectator toilet facilities
- Pitch perimeter fencing
- Turnstiles
- DDA compliant access to and within stadium
- Amenity and emergency lighting within ground
- Installation of PA/CCTV spectator management systems
- Provision of dedicated control room
- Provision of dedicated first aid room
- Car parking provision

3.5 A preliminary order of cost estimate has been undertaken to establish what the total cost of providing all of these works as permanent facilities. In addition, a similar order of cost estimate has been undertaken to establish the cost of adopting a mixture of temporary hired in facilities along with those facilities that cannot practically be provided on a temporary basis and would have to be installed as permanent facilities. It is clear that implementing the latter option will result in significant nugatory expenditure. These costs are discussed in greater detail in Section 4 below. It should be borne in mind that officers have had very limited time to compile these estimates.

3.6 With the location of a temporary stand as indicated in place, it is highly likely that the Athletics Club will be displaced over the duration that this stand is in situ. Alternative arrangements will have to be found for the Athletics Club to carry out their activities over the duration of the time the temporary stand is in place.

- 3.7 Members will also be aware that Council have recently appointed the Design Team to develop the long-term scheme (which Council funding is in place for). As these latest suggested temporary proposals have only been recently forwarded to Council for consideration, it is not yet possible to establish how they might impact negatively on the proposed programme for the delivery of long-term permanent works. However, it is likely that there will be some form of a delay to the programme for long-term, permanent stadium facilities project if this short-term temporary proposal is implemented and it will certainly involve significant nugatory expenditure.

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement and other Implications

- 4.1 To comply with Council's own procurement policy, quotations will have to be sought from four separate suppliers for the temporary supply of a moveable, demountable stand. In line with the policy, these quotations can be sought from a restricted list of suppliers drawn up by officers provided the lowest quotation received is under £30,000 (Ex. VAT). If the estimated cost of the temporary supply of the stand is anticipated to be over £30,000, then as per Council policy, a Public Advertisement will be required. If this is the case, then the NIFL timeframe of March/early April cannot be met.
- 4.2 NIFL approval of any stand would be required along with an assessment under regulated sports grounds safety criteria. Facilities for disabled access would also be a requirement.
- 4.3 As indicated in Section 3.5 above, a preliminary order of cost estimate has been undertaken to establish what the total cost of providing all of these works as permanent facilities. In addition, a similar approximate order of cost estimate has been undertaken to establish the cost of adopting a mixture of temporary hired in facilities along with those facilities that cannot practically be provided on a temporary basis and would have to be installed as permanent facilities. The cost for the latter long-term permanent works has been estimated at approximately £1 million. The cost of the provision of a short-term compliant stadium has been estimated at approximately £0.75 million (this figure assumes NIFL will accept the provision of the existing sub-standard sized changing units in the year preceding promotion, though there is no guarantee they will do so). Of this £750k figure, approximately £400k would be for facilities that could be used as part of the long-term, permanent stadium, with the remaining £350k for facilities hired in for the short-term facility and being of no benefit to the development of the long-term, permanent stadium.

- 4.4 There is clearly a significant financial risk to Council in that some of the proposed expenditure listed in section 4.2 could be nugatory. The nugatory spend would involve the cost of that equipment hired in to provide quick temporary facilities but which would not form part of the long-term permanent stadium project, currently estimated at approximately £350k. Council could be seen to have undertaken nugatory spend if Strabane Athletic were not promoted to the Championship for the 19/20 Intermediate season yet Council would have invested significant funding on hired facilities on the basis that the football club were going to get promoted.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 That Members consider the options available for works required at Melvin Arena to ensure IFA Intermediate Championship Standard Compliance.
- 5.2 A further report will be brought forward as required following additional clarifications from NIFL, statutory bodies and the views of stakeholder groups and residents.

Background Papers

None