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**BLACKWELL MEADOWS COMMUNITY SPORTS HUB EXPANSION**

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**Responsible Cabinet Members -  
Councillor Steve Harker, Efficiency and Resources Portfolio  
Councillor Nick Wallis, Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress of the Blackwell Meadows Community Sports Hub expansion and seek the necessary authorisations to progress the Council's contribution to enable this project.

**Summary**

2. In March 2015 Cabinet agreed to assist in the facilitation of the expansion of Blackwell Meadows Community sports hub by:
  - (a) Agreeing heads of terms and a lease for land required for car parking
  - (b) Supporting the project by constructing the car park utilising capital and grant funding.
  - (c) Relaxing restrictive covenants to enable the development.
3. DRFC have obtained planning permission to expand the Community Sports Hub at Blackwell Meadows and the works to be completed include stadium works, changing room upgrades and the provision of a car park.
4. The project has progressed and the necessary mechanisms are in place and ready to be triggered to deliver the project as per the Cabinet report of 3 March 2015.
5. However, since the last meeting, detailed design work has been undertaken on the car park and the estimated £140k has been firmed up as £175k predominantly due to ecological mitigation and ground conditions. Sport England has agreed to increase their grant by £5k to £75k, which leaves a £30k with commercial interest shortfall. It is proposed that the Council initially meet this additional cost and there

will be a repayment mechanism within the lease for the car park – which will see the £30k repaid to the Council from DRFC over the first 10 years of the lease term.

## **Recommendations**

6. It is recommended that :-
  - (a) Revised capital costs are accepted in relation to the car park element of the project and the capital is released.
  - (b) The Director of Neighbourhoods and Resources Group be given delegated powers to agree a repayment mechanism within the car parking lease for the recovery of the current project shortfall in consultation with the Director of Economic Growth.

## **Reasons**

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
  - (a) To enable the public of Darlington to continue to access the leisure facilities offered by DRFC through the Community Sports Hub.
  - (b) To assist in the facilitation of the expansion to a strategically important Community Sports Hub.
  - (c) To assist in the increase in sport participation numbers within the Borough.
  - (d) To assist in the relocation of Darlington Football Club to the town, and to maximise economic benefits of hosting home match days within the Borough.
  - (e) To protect previous Council investment made in the provision of community sport pitches.

**Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth**

## **Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

Kirsty McGready: Extension: 6314

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no crime and disorder issues with these proposals at the current time
Health and Well Being	Where relevant, the development of the facilities will be subject to a General safety certificate under Safety of Sports Ground Act 1975 and the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987.
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon impact implications in this report
Diversity	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address.
Wards Affected	Park West
Groups Affected	The impact of the report on any Group is considered to be minimal.
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	<p>The continuation of participation in rugby and other sporting and community related opportunities at Blackwell Meadows support the following outcomes of ODPP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More people active and involved – through providing the infrastructure to improve involvement in sport and physical activity. This will encourage people to be physically active in support of their health and well-being.</li> <li>• More people healthy and independent – this project will improve the wider determinants of health, including sport and physical activity which is priority for improving the long-term inequalities in health.</li> <li>• Children and young people have the best start in life - the project will assist in the reduction of obesity in children through providing the facilities and opportunities for children and young people to participate in sport. For example through mini and junior football and rugby.</li> <li>• Economic growth – through increasing visitors into the town and through also keeping home matches within the town – this project will bring income into the local economy and support the creation of jobs.</li> </ul>
Efficiency	The proposal should ensure the long term future of the club and in doing so reduce the ongoing officer time and involvement from the Council.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

#### Background

- The Blackwell Meadows Community Sports Hub is important sporting infrastructure in the borough as it is one of the hub sites identified in the recent Darlington Borough Council Playing Pitch Strategy. Three key themes of this strategy are that sport facilities are fit for purpose, have a high level of user and resident satisfaction

and that access to existing facilities is maximised. This project supports those three key themes.

9. Darlington Rugby Football Club (**DRFC**) has a strong membership base including Darlington Youth Football Club, Darlington Bulls Football Club, Darlington Rugby League Football Club and the Gentleman and Lady Archers of Darlington. DRFC has a robust business plan which seeks to significantly add to this membership through new partner clubs and teams who access on site facilities. To facilitate present and future users, the Club require additional car parking and changing room provision to overcome the existing high demand for the use of the pitch facilities, especially on a weekend.
10. A ground-sharing agreement is to be signed between DRFC and Darlington Football Club (**DFC**) imminently which will see DFC entering a 25 year lease with DRFC. This will allow the Football Club to move from its current location in Bishop Auckland, back into Darlington where they will share grounds with DRFC. To accommodate the move, all works proposed at the Club are within the parameters of the FA's ground grading Category C whilst also ensuring that future promotions and ground grading requirements can be accommodated easily.
11. DRFC have received planning permission for the development (14/01251/FUL).
12. At the Cabinet meeting of 3 March 2015 the following was approved to support the project -
  - (a) Granting a lease on Council owned land adjacent to the ground. The lease is in an agreed format and will be signed concurrently alongside the licence and commercial agreements between DFC and DRFC early July 2016.
  - (b) Providing the car park to service the needs of the community sports pitches and both DRFC and DFC on match days. £0.14m of funding was approved in Cabinet on the 3 March 2015
  - (c) Relaxing the restrictive covenant on DRFC's land at Blackwell Meadows to give them the ability to secure borrowing for funding part of their share of project costs. The Deed of Variation for this has been drafted and approved. It will be signed concurrently with the other legals covered in 13a in early July 2016.

### **Car Park Provision and Funding**

13. A detailed car park specification and design has been produced to meet the requirements of the site. This will be an unbound surface with street lighting. Through this detailed design work, the final cost of the car park has been firmed up as £175,000. The difference between the estimated cost and the final cost are predominantly down to ecological mitigation and ground conditions.
14. As the final costings are over 10% of the original scheme value Cabinet are asked to approve the additional capital spend which will be initially funded without impact

on MTFP through utilising existing funds that are ringfenced for Blackwell Meadows. The additional costs will be ultimately funded as follows:

- (a) £5,000 from Sport England funding
- (b) £30,000 through a leasing arrangement with DRFC

15. The sum of up to £0.03m will be repaid by DRFC to the Council as an additional rent over a 10 year term subject to commercial interest rates under the leasing arrangements for the car park.

### **Financial Implications**

16. The cost difference that has been identified since the approval in March 2015 will be funded by DRFC over a 10 year period together with commercial interest and by additional Sport England funding.
17. The agreement to lease has provision to protect the Council against further cost increases and the Council will not be required to proceed with the works beyond the amounts stated in this report under the proposed legal documents.

### **Corporate Landlord Advice**

18. Facilitating the expansion of the Community Sports Hub at Blackwell Meadows and enabling Darlington Football Club to relocate will hopefully safeguard the future of both Clubs but also ensure the Council's investment to date in the additional playing pitches is protected.