

## **Layham Road Sports Ground Artificial Pitch:** **End Project Report, December 2023**

### ***Brief Background***

This project was a seedling as far back as April 2014 when the Sports & Open Spaces Committee agreed to form a sub-committee re: interest for an artificial pitch. Since then there has been much debate, research and investigation into Layham Road as a possible location and with other parties such as Rugby Football Union, Football Foundation and Football Association.

The Football Foundation would need to be the main funder of the pitch and a pitch was expected to cost in excess of £850,000. Therefore to progress discussions with the Football Foundation and assessing the site, the Council needed to sign up to the Football Foundation Framework. This was done in July 2022.

Following concerns raised in 2022 by some Councillors on behalf of the public regarding environmental impacts and health and safety concerns of the infill materials of the Football Foundations proposed artificial pitch, the Council agreed “to use alternative, organic technology in the proposed artificial pitch”.

This led to many conversations and site visits with the Football Foundation and Football Association and it was apparent that the Football Foundation were at that time only using one infill which was not organic or sustainably produced. The Football Foundation advised they were conducting trials at a site in Sheffield on six alternative infill solutions but that there would not be a date for these trials to be started or concluded. At the time of writing, the last update from then Football Foundation was in July 2023 whereby we were advised that there was no news to report on the trial and the Sheffield facility was still under construction, so no data was yet being collected.

In November 2022, officers advised Council that the pavilion was the priority and the lack of facilities was detrimental to sports clubs in the short and long term and therefore should be progressed with haste, and to do this they would need to put the pitch project in abeyance until further information was available on the infill materials and the council had completed the pavilion rebuild. This was agreed by Full Council and no further work of the pitch was conducted until this report written in November 2023.

### ***Outcomes***

1. Research into the location, following discussions with and architect for space planning, the Football Association and Football Foundation in 2022, led to a realisation that the space available at Layham Road Sports Ground would not satisfy a full-sized pitch when all ancillary space was included and as such the Football Association advised that it would not fulfil the needs of the surrounding clubs from their point of view, despite there being a need identified for an artificial pitch in the Hadleigh area. They expressed concern of a loss of adult football if a smaller pitch were sited there as they would not be able to play matches on it whereas now with grass pitches at full size, they can.
2. Further to the issue raised on size and infill noted above, the land is subject to flooding, and whilst the likelihood of not being granted planning permission was raised at meetings in the early stages, it was deemed to be something that would be looked into at a later stage. The project never got far enough to be discussed with the planning department but flooding at the lower level of the grounds (not where the pitch would have been proposed) is a common occurrence and a picture provided by Councillor Beggerow in October 2023 (right) proved that in severely adverse conditions, flooding is liable to encroach onto the upper terrace.
3. Football Foundation Sheffield Trials are ongoing and performance is undetermined as there is insufficient data so an alternative infill for the Council would not be able to be signed off by the Football Foundation who would have been the main funder and tender consultant.
4. Funding has been investigated and was originally pegged alongside the pavilion rebuild which would have attracted higher levels of funding. With the economic fluctuations in recent years,



particularly high levels of inflation, many match funding schemes are no longer available for this type of venture. The Football Foundation would potentially provide up to about 80% of the funding for a full-sized pitch but would require the council to contribute the remainder which, following the pavilion major project would be unlikely to be able to fulfil.

This does not mean that the council has been unsuccessful in its project, simply that after all the research, public feedback and financial implications, the business case is no longer viable and to continue would be to be frivolous with council resources and public funds.

### ***Finances***

The cost of the project to date has been £859. As the Town Council employs a Projects Officer, it is not necessary to be recorded separately as the salary is for covering all aspects related to major projects in the council, whether they end prematurely or not.

The project at end stage should not incur any further costs.

### ***Next steps***

The council will need to inform the Football Foundation of the premature closure of this project and file all documents and decisions. It would be prudent to place a notice in the Hadleigh Community News as not everybody with views on the pitch looks at Council meetings and papers.

There are no further actions or products to hand over after the project ends.

### ***Recommendation***

As the business case (financially and considering public opinion) for this project is no longer valid, it is recommended to formally end the project prematurely. Whilst this project of locating an artificial pitch at Layham Road Sports Ground is ended and there is no distinct project to continue with, the Council is recommended to remain open-minded to third party approaches for artificial pitches on non-council-owned land in the future and assess those on their merits at that time.