

Ledbury Neighbourhood Development Plan

Meeting Note

Meeting held via Zoom on 20th August 2021 at 11.00am

Purpose: To discuss matters about the area and delivery of land for playing fields south of Little Marcle Road, Ledbury.

Present: Phillip Howells – PH (Ledbury Town Council and NDP Steering Group Chair)
Keely Brown – KB (Football Foundation - FF)
Dan Chance – DC (Herefordshire Football Association - HFA)
Ruth Jackson – RJ (Herefordshire Council)
Nick Fish - NF (Ledbury Swifts FC)
Steve Onions - SO (Ledbury Swifts FC)
John Wilesmith - JW (Ledbury Swifts FC)
Peter Boyle – PB (Ledbury Town FC)
Bill Bloxsome – BB (Planning Consultant assisting with the NDP)

1. Background

There is a need to find a site for new playing fields for football which is accepted by all. A site search has taken place with a number of options considered. The area south of Little Marcle Road is considered to be the best option. Discussions within the local and wider sporting community and with the local authority (Herefordshire Council) about the need and search for a site have taken place over at least the last 5 years and in 2016 a number of plans for the preferred site were prepared. Contact has been made with the landowners (including the area for pitches and also land required for access). The community was recently consulted upon including the proposal to the use this land for playing fields (and other matters) and it received overwhelming support.

2. Area of Land Required

2.1 It was noted that the area of land south of Little Marcle Road is identified in Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy as a strategic location for employment although it is not site specific. Some 12 hectares is required for employment and, given that the Core Strategy is currently being reviewed, this may increase as the plan period is rolled forward. It was advised that work on the NDP had identified land belonging to three landowners that could, in combination provide more than the current required amount and this had been included in the recent public consultation, receiving support. Further work is underway to determine the landscape requirements to mitigate any effects of such development on the setting of the town, and this is expected to be available shortly. In addition, it is understood the release of this land, which has been the subject of discussion under the Market Town's Economic Investment Plan, will be included in its programme as a priority project. This would have the benefit of enabling access to the proposed playing field area as well as the employment area. A meeting with those producing the Market Town's Economic Investment Plan report (which is imminent) is to be arranged.

Action: BB to arrange the meeting so that RJ can attend (in addition to those currently involved). Consideration is also to be given to whether other planning officers should also attend.

2.2 Two options had been considered for pitch layouts One comprises all grass pitches and the second utilises a 3/4G pitch with fewer grass pitches requiring less land. The preference was for the second option, and this fits better with the landowners wishes. A layout has been prepared based on dimensions provided by the HFA. The area required for this is some 4.6 hectares (11.4 acres). However, it does need to be checked to determine whether the pitch configuration is appropriate given experience by the FF and HFA. Biodiversity issues may need to be addressed that could affect the amount of land required and the approach to floodlighting the main pitch.

Action – NF to provide KB and DC with the layout, preferably on a scaled drawing if this can be provided. KB and DC to comment upon the layout with advice. The football clubs then to work with the NDP Steering Group to determine what adjustments, if needed, should be made to the area required.

3. Funding

The FF can provide up to 70% funding for eligible elements for the right projects. Eligibility for all elements does require a number of outcomes to be met, including future proofing. The football clubs have developed a 5-year development plan and identified needs up to 2035. The two football clubs would need to work with the HFA upon what outcomes need to be met and how. The FF work on 3-year funding agreements and at the moment will be looking to consider projects for 2022 (summer) onwards.

Herefordshire Council has some £131,440 currently expected towards playing fields from 1 development (Barratt Homes). Further monies may be available from a planning permission on a large housing site north of the Viaduct although this has yet to be confirmed or quantified. Whatever money is available through this source, it will be delivered over time and may not be available in one go. This may affect when delivery of the project (or parts of it) would be possible.

It is expected that the landowner of Ledbury Town FC's current facility will wish to see them relocated. Should an alternative use be sought for this land, permission is expected only to be granted on the basis that another facility of equal (or better) value has been provide. Hence a financial contribution (or appropriate alternative) to enable this would be a requirement. Such a facility would need to be available before a new use for the current land would be granted.

NF pointed to an email from the Leader of Herefordshire Council indicating that it would enable the relevant funds to be made available for the new pitches to be provided following a meeting at which concern was expressed about the asset transfer arrangements that did not take into account the needs of Ledbury Swifts FC.

In principle, funds should be available to enable the preferred option (reduced area with 3/4G pitch) although there was some concern about timescales that needed further investigation.

Actions:

- 1. The two football clubs need to confirm with the HFA (and through this the FF), how it may maximise the amount of grant available from the FF.**
- 2. RJ to confer with the relevant officer at Herefordshire Council responsible for administering the S106 scheme, what monies are available through this source and how it may be provided.**
- 3. NF to provide RJ with a copy of HC Leader's email. RJ to investigate the Council Leader's commitment to supporting the project.**

4. Land Value

NF had received informal advice about the value of the playing field land. Elements that may affect its value include Herefordshire Council's planning policy for employment land in the vicinity, the fact that the land does not have a direct access to the highway, and other possible planning requirements. Herefordshire Council may be able to seek the advice from its staff or the District Valuer upon what the value of the land might be when the exact area is known.

Action: When the site area is known/confirmed, information be passed to RJ to see whether Herefordshire Council will be able to obtain a more accurate land value.

5. Delivery Mechanism

Herefordshire Council would not be interested in any role in owning and/or developing the land for playing fields. The most likely arrangement is for the football clubs to establish some form of Board to take on the project and manage the land upon it being completed. The approach on the adjacent land where the rugby club has taken on its playing fields through an asset transfer is one that the football club might utilise. DC indicated he would try to identify other examples through his connections that could be considered. In any event, it would appear that there are useful options that might be pursued to deliver what is required and the football clubs are willing to take on the role to deliver and subsequently manage the playing fields.

Action: DC to identify examples of management arrangements that might assist in delivering the project and subsequent management.