

Draft Report of WPC consultation meeting re Mill Lane sports site

April 5th, 2022

The meeting was chaired by Cllr Malcolm Burt.

Approximately 60 people attended.

Introductory remarks

1. Cllr Lorrae Hayes (Chair Recreation Committee) acknowledged that the most controversial element of the MasterPlan was the artificial full sized football pitch
2. Cllrs Hayes and Burt were adamant that:
 - the pitch was not Wessex League standard
 - that Infinity FC first team would not play at the site
 - that there were no arrangements for Infinity FC to use the pitch
 - “that it is not a Wessex League pitch, full stop”
 - that the pitch could be used for multiple purposes, could be marked out for different games and for different age groups
 - that the boundary fencing would be wire mesh so that spectators could watch the action without needing to pay, no turnstiles
 - stakeholders would be asked to come forward to join a steering group to take the project forward and make recommendations to the Recreation Committee.
 - The need is to get agreement on the plan so that a planning application can be submitted with a full financial profile that will convince planners and funders
 - There is still not enough information available on what young people want on the site
 - It was suggested by one Councillor that there was not enough evidence about what people would support at the site and WRA’s survey response was treated rather dismissively ...*(WRA has contested this reminding the Council of the data collected in the Survey, including from 109 under 12s)*
3. James Coney (Director, Fieldform) gave a description of the 3G pitch. He stressed again that the pitch was not suitable for Wessex League football. The standard of pitch to be installed would attract funding from the Football Foundation
4. Malcolm Burt stated that the football pitch at the Recreation Ground is unfit for purpose and Wickham Dynamos needed a better playing surface on which to play.

Q & A

The meeting continued with 2-minute statements from those who registered to speak and responses from Cllrs Burt, Hayes and James Coney. The thrust of these exchanges is summarised below

The 3G pitch

1. There is wide support in the village for a better playing surface for Wickham Dynamos. Their changing facilities date from the 1950s and are unacceptable in the 2020s

2. Concerns were expressed over the business plan viability of a 3G pitch that will not be suitable for Wessex League play
3. Wickham Dynamos confirmed that they are unlikely to be able to afford hire charges of a 3G pitch. Cllr Hayes stated that there would probably have to be preferential rates for local users
4. Winchester Playing Strategy makes clear that 3G provision should be located in urban areas not villages/rural settings
5. If we want the village to remain a village and not become an urban area our sports facilities should reflect that principle and not mimic town characteristics
6. The Playing Pitch Strategies of Winchester and Fareham state that there are shortages of 3G football pitches **today but both local authorities' plans eradicate those shortages in their planning horizons**. The revised Needs Assessment should include this information, but it chooses to remain silent on it. There will be shortages of pitches for youth and junior play.
7. There will be up to 8 3G pitches installed within 4 to 8 mil of Wickham that will compete for business with the proposed pitch at Mill Lane
8. The reasons why the 3G **playing surface** at Mill Lane cannot be used for Wessex League play were not clearly answered (and are being followed up). It is clear that the "associated" elements of a "Wessex League stadium" (turnstiles, solid boundary fencing, stands) are not part of the current proposal. But if revenue from pitch hires proves insufficient without income from Wessex League use, then alterations could easily be made to allow it.
9. It would be possible to secure grant funding for elements of a new natural turf pitch if that was to be installed.
10. James Coney referred to the Hampshire Local Football Facilities Plan (LFFP). He was asked if that was the same as the Football Foundation Local Plan and said it was not. *(Post meeting note: a search of the Hampshire FA website provides a link to find local plans; that link connects to the Football Foundation local plans – so the Hampshire LFFP is in fact the Football Foundation Plan. See footnote for further information)*

Other facilities on the site

1. Concerns were raised that the running track was not fit for purpose and needed to be re-thought.
2. The nature of access to the site by pedestrians was questioned and will be looked at
3. The cricket net proposal was questioned as to its adequacy and value
4. The viability of a bowling green on the site was questioned: need for clubhouse, maintenance costs, security
5. Access to the Meon Valley trail was mentioned but no more than that

Other issues raised

1. This is a village. We don't want to have facilities that are "urban"
2. How can we accommodate Dynamos' understandable ambitions without providing a 3G pitch?
3. Traffic increases and safety: already this is a problem for the Village as a whole and Mill Lane in particular. It will be exacerbated by increased traffic flow to the

enlarged surgery off Mill Lane – and the decision regarding serving Welborne patients at the surgery has still not been made.

4. Access to and from the site would be a safety concern: Mill Lane is a “rat run” and visibility splays will need to be extensive to ensure safe use of the entrance/exit.
5. Concern over past if not current relationships between the Council, Infinity and consultants were raised but forcefully denied and that even if there were such relationships they do not exist now.

WRA Committee view of the situation following April 5th meeting.

1. The public denial that Infinity men’s adult teams (who play in/aspire to play in the Wessex League) are not going to play at Mill Lane is welcome.
2. However, the pitch proposed for the site is still (as far as we can tell - we are trying to get a definitive answer) suitable for Wessex League play. If it proves to be a playing surface acceptable to the League, then the fear still would be that Wessex League football **could** be played there in the future.
3. If the business plan for the pitch does not stack up without a Wessex League team being accommodated at the site, then there might be a re-think.
4. Wessex League team or no, the pitch will have to raise considerable annual revenue from hire fees to pay for year-round maintenance and a sinking fund for replacement of the “carpet” – the term used to describe the surface material every seven to ten years or so. Cost currently in the region of £200,000 plus
5. The need for significant revenue means that although we might **today** not intend Wessex League football to be played at the site, it might be forced upon us as a way out of a financial hole. In any case, the funds needed will only come from usage fees and it is probable that there will be too little demand from village users to cover what is needed. So, no Wessex team perhaps, but nevertheless we will have to face the fact that Mill Lane will be marketed to teams from outside the village with the consequent downsides that will occasion (traffic etc).
6. It will, therefore, be vital to make sure that the business plan can confidently forecast not only the amounts needed to cover on-going costs but the source of them.
7. In the context of forecasting demand and revenue, attention must be given to the fact that up to 8 new 3G pitches in Fareham are planned in Fareham and Whiteley. These will come on stream in the coming years – the first approval for one of these pitches, in Fareham, was granted in January 2022. All will be within reasonable driving distance of the village and will compete for the business that we might hope to get – and because they are in urban sites from which users will come in far larger numbers than will come from Wickham, it is possible that the user demand we need, for financial viability, will disappear.
8. If the scenario in 7 above comes about, then to have lain a 3G pitch will prove to be an expensive mistake.....which would be
9. a considerable blow to Wickham Dynamos whose needs are considerable and justified. To cover this possibility, in addition to considering a 3G pitch for Mill Lane, consideration might sensibly be given to cost a natural turf pitch with superior drainage which would not need the same level of usage to cover on-going costs. This alternative option should be prepared before any decisions are final.

10. A 3G pitch in the Village, whether or not fully utilised, would make Wickham a natural target for the allocation of more housing as it would add to the service facilities available to residents. The Village would be raised to a higher level in the “hierarchy of settlements.” In 2011, of settlements in the district outside Winchester, Wickham was in the top 4 as judged by local services provision (Market Towns & Rural Development Areas Strategies, July 2011). The new sports facilities may push it even higher.
11. The Winchester Playing Pitch Strategy states that 3G pitches should be located in urban settings, not villages or rural settings. If we want to remain rural in nature, and not be classified as an urban settlement, we need to balance the full breadth of local considerations when deciding on new facilities that move us closer to the definition “town” as opposed to “village”.
12. The plan needs to cater for the Recreation Ground as well as Mill Lane. If Dynamos, for example, could have better pitch and changing facilities there, the playground equipment that is too close to the pitch (and the main road) could be relocated to Mill Lane. That would solve Dynamos’ concerns about the safety of playground users from flying footballs.

Footnote: Football Foundation Local Plan

The Plan identifies several sites across the Winchester District for investment.

Mill Lane is one of these sites. They have consulted the Council (Parish Clerk?) in their deliberations. The plan was published in November 2020

They propose that Mill Lane become a “Football Hub” comprising:

LOCATION

Location details: Mill Lane Sports Facility

FACILITIES

- Natural grass pitch improvements (2)
- New 11v11 Floodlit 3G FTP (1)
- New Changing Pavilion (1)

OWNER

Local Authority

DELIVERABILITY SCORE

Medium (2/4)

NFFS OUTCOME SCORE

2.0/4

OVERALL SCORE

50% (6.0/12)

NOTES

As part of a housing development in the village of Wickham (120 additional dwellings), a new sports hub is being developed which will comprise of a

grass stadia pitch plus a full sized training 3G facility. The grass pitch will accommodate Infinity FC and allow the Club to meet the standards of the Wessex League as well as accommodating training demand from local clubs.

Due to the site's proximity to Fareham it will also provide opportunities for clubs in that authority too.

It is anticipated that the pitch will be in situ by the start of the 2021/22 season.

PROJECT FOCUS

Adult female; Adult male; BAME; Disability; IMD / lower social economic groups; Mini-soccer; Pro-club; Small-sided informal; Small-sided recreational; Small-sided teams and leagues; Youth female; Youth male

<https://localplans.footballfoundation.org.uk/local-authorities-index/winchester/winchester-local-football-facility-plan/#tab-section-improved-grass-pitches>

NOTE: according to the FF state a football hub must contain 3 pitches and have good access. Mill Lane has neither. WRA argued in its response to the first Need Assessment that the site does not fit the criteria for a hub.
