
Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	5 September 2017
Report By:	Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development	Report	EDUCOM/65/17/MM
Contact Officer:	Martin McNab	Contact No:	4246
Subject:	Provision of Crawl Space Access to Inverclyde Academy's Pitches		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To bring to the Committee's attention the decision of the Petitions Committee in terms of a petition regarding access to the Inverclyde Academy Pitch.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 A petition was submitted to the Council requesting the provision of either crawl space access to Inverclyde Academy's pitches or creation of suitable 3G pitches for the area. The petition was considered at the Petitions Committee on 15 June 2017.
- 2.2 The Petitions Committee decided to support the petition and required that a detailed report be brought to the Education & Communities Committee for the Committee's consideration.
- 2.3 It must be recognised that the building of Inverclyde Academy in 2007 resulted in a loss of open access pitches, the Academy being built on the site of 3 blaes pitches. There would however be a number of risks in allowing free access to the Academy 3G pitch, the most significant of which would be the potential loss of the pitch for a period to school use if it were to be damaged. Unfortunately it is also the case that there is no suitable site for alternative provision even if funding was available for this.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee
1. Notes the decision of the Petitions Committee to support the petition regarding crawl hole access to the Inverclyde Academy 3G pitch.
 2. Agrees to the provision of a crawl hole at the Inverclyde Academy 3G pitch for a trial period of 1 year given the special circumstances of the pitch as noted in 6.1 and 6.2. This would be with the proviso that the trial could be suspended in the event of significant damage occurring as a result of the crawl hole being installed.

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 The Petitions Committee convened on 15 June 2017 to consider the following petition which had been submitted to the Council with 593 signatures:

“We demand the creation of crawl-spaces and opening of Inverclyde Academy AstroTurf pitches to local youngsters on a 24/7 basis or the creation of a suitable 3G AstroTurf pitch within the immediate locality to bring the area up to a similar standard with other areas in Inverclyde.”

4.2 The Petitions Committee had two possible options,

- to reject the petition, bringing the matter to an end; or
- to support the petition and require Officers to submit a detailed report to the appropriate Service Committee on the subject matter of the petition

The Committee decided to support the petition in principle, hence this report to the first available Education & Communities Committee.

4.3 There are a number of issues that need to be considered around the provision of crawl holes. Security and the risk of damage to the pitch and equipment such as goals and nets are major issues. There are also increased demands on janitorial staff in litter picking and ensuring that the pitch is safe and suitable for school use. Crawl hole access to the George Road pitch has led to youths drinking on the pitch in the past with the risk of broken glass.

4.4 If the decision is made not to install a crawl hole the petition asks for creation of a separate 3G pitch in the immediate locality. Unfortunately even if the budget were to be available for this there is no obvious site in the area for another 3G pitch. It is also the case that provision of another 3G pitch would be extremely unlikely to attract any external funding given the overall level of artificial pitch provision in Inverclyde.

5.0 PROVISION OF CRAWL HOLES ACROSS INVERCLYDE

5.1 There are currently 10 full sized 3G pitches in Inverclyde together with 4 full sized 2G. Of these there are crawl holes at 3 pitches: Parklea, George Road and Lady Octavia. There was once a crawl hole at the Broomhill Pitch however this was blocked up following a vandalism incident which resulted in the pitch being out of operation for a number of weeks.

5.2 Crawl Holes were originally installed at the pitches due to concerns over the Council's potential liability should anyone be injured climbing into a pitch. There were also concerns regarding potential delays in rescuing anyone should there be an incident in a locked pitch. On the former point, current advice is that the Council would not be liable in any way should anyone be injured climbing a fence; an insurance claim to that effect has in fact been successfully repudiated. On the latter point, the emergency services, in particular Fire & Rescue, have equipment which would allow access to a pitch in an emergency.

5.3 The wording of the petition suggests that open access to 3G pitches is the norm across Inverclyde. This is far from the case with only three pitches having this facility and large areas of Inverclyde are a significant distance from a 3G pitch with a crawl hole. It should also be noted that the pitches with crawl holes are only accessible for free recreational use when there are no bookings on the pitches. This may be the case for a period during the day through the summer however for most of the year these pitches are heavily booked and are in use most evenings.

5.4 No crawl holes have ever been provided at pitches associated with schools. The reasons for this include:

- Security – In many cases giving access to the pitch entails giving access to the school grounds. This would be the case at, for example, Wemyss Bay Primary.
- Potential child protection issues – At some locations facilities, particularly MUGAs, are behind

the school and out of sight. In these circumstances it has not been considered appropriate to allow unsupervised access.

- Risk of damage – while the cost of repairing the 3G pitches damaged by vandalism has overall been relatively low, the cost of the repair to Broomhill being for example £1700, the pitch was out of commission for some weeks. This would obviously be more of an issue at a school where the loss of the facility would have an effect on curricular PE delivery as well as after school activities.

6.0 ISSUES AT INVERCLYDE ACADEMY

- 6.1 In some respects the 3G pitch at Inverclyde Academy would appear to be more suitable for a crawl hole than any others in the school estate. The pitch is outside the overall school campus and could be accessed without giving wider access to the school grounds. The pitch is also covered by the school's CCTV system. It should be noted on the latter point however that the CCTV system is not actively monitored and will, at most, therefore only be of use evidentially should the pitch be damaged. The system will not lead to any intervention to prevent damage and any deterrent effect is doubtful.
- 6.2 There should not be any particular child protection issues at the Inverclyde Academy 3G pitch as the pitch is in fairly open view of the surrounding area. This is not the case in a number of other schools, in common with the access issue in 6.1 above. Any decision to allow a crawl hole at Inverclyde Academy should therefore not be seen as a precedent for other school pitches.
- 6.3 Unrestricted access to pitches has a number of other potential costs. As noted in 4.3 above unrestricted access increases the risk of damage to nets and goals. The nets at Inverclyde Academy are currently damaged and new nets are required. This damage has been partially attributed to the youths who climb into the pitch outwith lets. Installation of a crawl hole is likely to make matters worse. The alternative of removing nets and only putting them up before lets would have significant implications for school and letting staff. There would also be costs in carrying out clean ups and checks before the start of the school day to remove plastic bottles, litter and check for any broken glass.
- 6.4 The main risk of allowing crawl hole access to the Inverclyde Academy Pitch however is the risk of loss of access for school curricular and extra-curricular use should the pitch be damaged. A proportion of the external bookings could potentially be relocated although there would undoubtedly be a loss of income. The use of the pitch by the school itself cannot be easily relocated and for this reason provision of a crawl hole cannot be recommended.

7.0 PROVISION OF ALTERNATIVE 3G PITCH IN THE AREA

- 7.1 The petition requests the “creation of a suitable 3G AstroTurf pitch within the immediate locality to bring the area up to a similar standard with other areas in Inverclyde” if crawl holes cannot be provided to access the Inverclyde Academy Pitch. As noted in 5.3 above the provision of open access by crawl holes is the exception rather than the norm implied by the petition.
- 7.2 There are clearly two major hurdles to cross in providing additional pitches: funding and availability of a suitable site. In terms of funding, the number of 3G pitches in Inverclyde is already significantly greater on a per capita basis than the rest of Scotland. It is therefore extremely unlikely that any external funding would be available for additional provision. If the provision was primarily for recreational use this would limit the funding options further. The cost of provision would therefore have to be borne entirely from the Council's capital budget which already has significant competing demands upon it.
- 7.3 Even if funding were to be available to install a further 3G pitch there is no obvious site available in the wider area, still less in the immediate locality. Any suitable ground in the area is entirely taken up by Inverclyde Academy, Ravenscraig Stadium and Sports Centre and Aileymill Primary. In the opinion of officers this is not therefore a viable proposition.
- 7.4 Consideration has been given to allowing access to the pitch at Aileymill Primary. This is a polymeric pitch, similar to a large MUGA. Unfortunately this would run the risk of the Council becoming liable for any damage at the premises. Aileymill is a PPP school therefore currently the Council does not carry this liability.

7.5 Obviously it must be recognised that the building of Inverclyde Academy undoubtedly resulted in the loss of a large area of open access blaes pitches. Although there are open MUGAs at St Andrew’s Primary and Branchton and some basic grass provision between Lincoln Road and Oxford Road these are not comparable to what was available prior to 2007.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

8.1 The provision of a crawl hole would be likely to lead to costs in terms of staff time for safety checks and litter picks, of increased wear and tear on equipment and potential damage to the pitch and equipment.

Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Legal

8.2 None

Human Resources

8.3 None

Equalities

8.4 Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES (see attached appendix)
X	NO - This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Repopulation

8.5 None.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 Petition for Consideration: Provision of Crawl Space Access to Inverclyde Academy’s Pitches or Creation of a Suitable 3G Pitch in Locality – Petitions Committee June 2017 **LP/053/17**.