
Report To:	Education and Communities Committee	Date:	11 May 2021
Report By:	Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development	Report No:	EDUCOM/19/21/RB
Contact Officer:	Tony McEwan, Head of Culture, Communities and Educational Resources	Contact No:	01475 712748
Subject:	Update on crawl holes for community pitches managed by Inverclyde Leisure		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Education and Communities Committee as to the current position for crawl holes for community pitches operated by Inverclyde Leisure and to ask the Committee to allocate a specific resource to open the crawl holes during the day and to close them at night.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 At the Education and Communities Committee on 10 March 2020, the Committee requested an update on issues involved in opening up crawl spaces at Inverclyde Leisure managed pitches. Inverclyde Leisure manage three 3G community pitches for Inverclyde Council. These are at Parklea, Broomhill and Drumshantie Road Gourock. The pitches are high quality and are predominantly used for bookings for local clubs to play games and to train. When the pitches are not in use for bookings, crawl holes have been installed to enable those local to the area to use the facilities. There are inevitable tensions between the provision of crawl holes and maintaining a facility that is of sufficient quality for club lets. Crawl holes at the IL pitches have been closed since the beginning of lockdown to discourage groups of people assembling on the pitches and also that there were no IL staff able to check the safety of the facility each day.
- 2.2 Whilst the direction of travel remains to reach a compromise between the use of pitches for lets and also the provision of crawl holes for community use, then a solution needs to be reached, at least on a trial basis.
- 2.3 The provision of crawl holes is primarily to allow young people to use the pitches between lets and to discourage them risking their health and safety when climbing over the high fences which surround the 3G pitches. However, if the crawl holes are left open in the evening after the last let, pitches are often damaged or used as a gathering place for anti-social behaviour.
- 2.4 As most of the anti-social behaviour takes place at night, the proposal is to pilot the provision of a dedicated resource to opening the crawl holes in the morning and closing them at night at a cost of £19k per year, but this may be less when lets resume. The funding for this resource would be taken from the U19's sports grants. The pilot will open the crawl holes at Drumshantie Road and Broomhill pitches in the first instance. Parklea has several grass pitches next to the 3G pitch which can be used by the community when they are not let.
- 2.5 In addition to the crawl holes for IL managed pitches, this paper seeks permission for officers to commence working on proposals for the future of the Broomhill pitch. This could include the possibility of changing the use of this pitch to a MUGA attached to the primary school which would reduce the costs associated with the pitch maintenance and rejuvenation.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Education and Communities Committee:

- notes the current situation regarding crawl holes at pitches managed by Inverclyde Leisure;
- approves the allocation of a resource to pilot the opening and closing of crawl spaces in the morning and at night; funded through the U19s sports grant budget; and
- agrees that a more detailed report be brought back to the Committee at a future date in relation to the use of the Broomhill pitch and that Council officers and Inverclyde Leisure begin initial consultation with the wider community.

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director
Education, Communities & Organisational Development

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At the Education and Communities Committee on 10 March 2020, the Committee requested an update on issues involved in opening up crawl spaces at Inverclyde Leisure managed pitches. Inverclyde Leisure manage three 3G community pitches for Inverclyde Council. These are at Parklea, Broomhill and Drumshantie Road Gourock. The pitches are high quality and are predominantly used for bookings for local clubs to play games and to train. As such the pitch surface needs to be checked before each booking and needs to be of a high standard as would be expected for the clubs paying for the facilities.
- 4.2 When the pitches are not in use for bookings, crawl holes have been installed to enable those local to the area to use the facilities. This means that the pitches are available for young people to play on without the need for a booking or an organised game.
- 4.3 There are inevitable tensions between the provision of crawl holes and maintaining a facility that is of sufficient quality for club lets. The provision of crawl holes means that the pitches are easily accessed and there have been frequent reports of anti-social behaviour, broken glass and other litter and vandalism. This usually occurs if the crawl spaces are left unlocked in the evening. Also, adult clubs have been known to use the crawl spaces to play without a let.
- 4.4 Young people have fewer opportunities to use the pitches. On the other hand, if the facilities were available for full-time community use (and not bookable lets), then the corresponding loss of income for the Council and IL would jeopardise the sustainability of the high quality pitches.
- 4.5 It is fair to say that the tension between crawl holes and bookable paid lets has been long-standing, however the situation has been exacerbated by the events of COVID-19. Inverclyde Leisure have had to make use of the Government scheme to furlough staff to ensure longer-term financial sustainability. This has meant that staff have not been available to regularly check the surface of the pitches and ensure they are safe to use. Young people have not been able to visit the homes of their friends and have increasingly used spaces such as the pitches to meet and congregate. Unfortunately anti-social behaviour (including broken glass on the pitch) has increased and made the pitches dangerous for use. In addition, despite it being against the rules to do so, adult teams have arranged games on the pitches without a let – using the crawl holes to gain entry.
- 4.6 The situation outlined in paragraph 4.5 has meant that Inverclyde Leisure had to close the crawl holes during lockdown to ensure safety. Inverclyde Leisure have installed hinged gates at two of the pitches to enable the closure of the crawl holes. Broken glass has repeatedly been left on the pitch meaning that the surface is unsafe. In addition, the opening of the crawl holes has been viewed to have encouraged the use of the pitch for unauthorised adult football games and also large gatherings.
- 4.7 Whilst the direction of travel remains to reach a compromise between the use of pitches for lets and also the provision of crawl holes, then a solution needs to be reached, at least on a trial basis.

5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 Most, but not all, of the antisocial behaviour happens at night. The proposal is to have a dedicated resource to open the crawl holes for two of the three pitches for community use during the day and to close the crawl holes for the three pitches at night (or after the last let). Parklea will not be affected during the pilot phase because it has grass pitches close by. This measure will reduce the opportunity for anti-social behaviour. As previously, any booked lets will have priority. Lighting will not be available unless there is a let because the intention of this proposal is to allow youngsters who wish to use the facility to do so on an ad hoc basis. Lighting the pitches without a let will encourage anti-social gatherings and defeat the purpose of what is being proposed.

5.2 To allow the crawl holes for the three pitches to be opened in the morning and then to be closed at night every day, the following resource is needed:

- Staffing costs of £280 per week (7 days) @ 52 weeks = £14,560
- Van Hire including fuel, servicing, insurance & road tax = £ 3,640
- Materials = £ 500

The total cost for this will be approximately £19,000. It should be noted that these are the costs when there are no pitch hires due to COVID-19. The cost may be less when the pitches are fully operational for hire. Because the cost is to promote sport across various different interest groups but primarily for young people, then the proposal is to vire the required money from the under 19s pitch waivers budget.

5.3 This arrangement allows 2 hours to open all of the crawl holes and most importantly – check that the facilities are safe for use. The plan would be to open the crawl holes between the hours of 8 am and 10 am. The exact times cannot be given because of the length of time taken to ensure the pitch is safe is unknown. If the pitch is not deemed to be safe to open, despite a reasonable time for cleaning and checking, then the crawl hole will remain closed. The same process will be undertaken at night – closing the crawl holes between 7 pm and 9 pm or if appropriate after the last let. Again the exact time cannot be given.

5.4 This proposal has the advantage of allowing ad hoc use for those who wish to use the facilities in a variety of ways for the intended purpose. It will discourage anti-social behaviour as much as possible. However, if the crawl holes are used on a regular basis by adult teams or private enterprises to avoid paying costs, then Inverclyde Leisure will reserve the right to close the crawl holes and this will be reported to the next Committee. If during the COVID-19 pandemic, adult teams use the facilities for organised games against the guidelines, then Inverclyde Leisure will also close the crawl holes until the appropriate authorities have been informed and taken all appropriate action.

5.5 This proposal is a pilot and an evaluation will be reported back to the Education and Communities Committee in January 2022 (or earlier if required). Whilst it will go some way to doing so, it will not completely alleviate the tension between a free community facility and the maintenance of a high quality pitch available for lets.

5.6 An option for future consideration is for the Broomhill pitch to be altered and to become a MUGA for St Patrick’s Primary School. This is feasible because it has relatively low use and the lets currently using the pitch could be accommodated elsewhere. There could be a small saving linked to this going forward. If agreed by the Committee, officers will work with Inverclyde Leisure to consult on this option and provide members with a fully-costed proposal.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Finance

Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
	U19s Sports Grant	2021/22	£19k		

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

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

6.2 **Legal**

N/A.

6.3 **Human Resources**

N/A.

6.4 **Equalities**

Equalities

(a) Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES
x	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
x	NO

(c) Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
x	NO

6.5 **Repopulation**

N/A.

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

7.1 N/A.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 N/A.