

Briefing Paper for Scrutiny, 16th February 2017

Artificial Sports Pitches

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **The purpose of the paper is to detail usage, costs, benefits and any issues relating to artificial pitches already installed in the Scottish Borders. This follows recent media reports which expressed the view from some high profile footballers who did not consider artificial pitches to be the best playing surface.**
- 1.2 In 2014 SBC progressed a programme of construction for a network of full sized artificial pitches in locations throughout the Scottish Borders, to complement those already in existence.
- 1.3 Live Borders, who at the time were already managing some of the existing artificial pitches within their estate, were asked to assume operational responsibility for the new pitches with SBC providing a commensurate management fee for doing so.
- 1.4 The report addresses concerns raised over the artificial pitch playing surface by providing an overview across the pitches managed by Live Borders, highlighting benefits and noting areas of concern while drawing on usage data and local case studies to provide context.

2 Background

- 2.1 At the Scrutiny meeting held on 18th February 2016, Members requested a briefing paper to detail the use, costs, benefits and any issues relating to artificial pitches already installed in the Scottish Borders.
- 2.2 Currently Live Borders operate six artificial pitches across the region, four second generation (2G) pitches and two third generation (3G) pitches. 2G pitches are predominantly sand dressed or sand filled pitches certified by the Federation of International Hockey (FIH) for use for competitive hockey fixtures. 3G pitches consist of a longer pile length with rubber infill and are certified by FIFA and World Rugby (formerly IRB) allowing competitive rugby and football matches to be played.
- 2.3 Table 1 lists all of the full sized artificial pitches currently operated by Live Borders. Other existing 2G pitches, mainly located on the school estate, are not managed by Live Borders and therefore not included in the table.

Table 1: Full sized pitches currently operated by Live Borders

Locality	Surface Type	Year of Build
Tweedbank	2G	1984
Galashiels	3G	2012
Peebles	2G	2014
Selkirk	2G	2015
Hawick	2G	2005
Hawick	3G	2016

- 2.4 As artificial 3G surfaces become more and more popular the debate about whether natural grass or artificial surfaces are better for competitive football and rugby at the highest level continues. Although the briefing paper will not provide the answers to this it will highlight some of the key benefits that the artificial pitches have and will continue to bring to the region.

3 Usage

- 3.1 Usage across the pitches consists of a mix of sports spanning a variety of ages and abilities from grass roots to performance. Predominantly usage of the 3G pitches is for rugby and football while hockey tends to be the predominant sport on 2G surfaces. Usage is not however limited to these sports and the diversity of the surface provides opportunities for many other sports.
- 3.2 Table 2 below details the total number of visits per pitch over the last full financial year (1st April 2015 - 31st March 2016). Data is not available for the Hawick 3G pitch as it has only been operational since November 2016.

Table 2: Total visits for 2015/16

Locality	Surface Type	Club Usage	Community Usage	Total Usage
Galashiels	3G	37,223	6,576	43,799
Tweedbank	2G	21,815	2,975	24,790
Peebles*	2G	14,029	2,284	16,313
Selkirk*	2G	3,738	462	4,200
Hawick*	2G	6,240	6,080	12,320
Hawick	3G		Opened Nov 2016	
Total Usage		83,045	18,377	101,422

NB: *School usage is not included in the totals. Peebles & Selkirk 2G pitches are located on the school estate and not operated by Live Borders during school hours and for consistency school bookings have not been included in the Hawick 2G totals.

Club usage refers to organised club bookings with other bookings, including schools, categorised under Community usage.

- 3.3 As the table shows the total annual visits across the pitches is 101,422 and although data is not available to compare against visitor numbers prior to the installation of the pitches the data clearly demonstrates significant use of the pitches throughout the region.
- 3.4 Based on current year to date performance data and the introduction of the new 3G pitch in Hawick, it is forecast that total visits for 2016/17 will be significantly higher.
- 3.5 Club usage for 2015/16 accounts for 82% of total visits across the pitches for both training sessions and competitive matches with junior usage equating to an average of 60% of total visits.
- 3.6 Usage of the 3G pitch in Galashiels is significantly higher than the other 2G pitches largely due to the fact that it accommodates both rugby and football. Usage at the 2G pitch in Hawick is forecast to fall as the majority of football bookings displace to the new 3G pitch.

4 Benefits

- 4.1 There has been much debate about the pros and cons of artificial surfaces and from time to time concerns are raised in the media as to the influence these surfaces have on professional sport.
- 4.2 Although the majority of the debate is surrounding 3G pitches which is the focus for the rest of this paper, it is worth noting the changing requirements for the highest level of hockey and the use of 2G pitches. Scottish Hockey, the governing body for hockey in Scotland, has issued a directive stating that all National League Division 1 teams (the top teams) must play on water-based surfaces in order to maintain a high level of hockey. With hockey fast growing and with the success of Borders Fjordhus Reivers there is a likely requirement for a water based pitch at some point in the near future.
- 4.3 The remainder of the paper now focusses solely on 3G surfaces with some key benefits noted below.
- 4.4 Artificial pitches enable significant increases in participation, ensuring far more individuals and communities benefit from the associated social and health benefits of physical activity. Our facilities are used by a broad spectrum of groups from clubs and schools to development programmes and recreational bookings.
- 4.5 Clubs are able to secure access to good quality affordable training pitches that can accommodate a much greater carrying capacity than grass pitches, providing greater opportunities for clubs to ensure fixtures are not cancelled in severe weather. This also brings the added benefit of relieving pressure on the existing grass pitches, helping to improve quality and reduce maintenance costs.

- 4.6 The improvement in playing surface that a 3G pitch delivers and the ability to play under floodlights (which many clubs do not have access to) helps the sustainability of clubs through increased participation as the game can be made more enjoyable, dynamic, fast and fun on consistent quality playing surfaces.
- 4.7 Gala Fairydean Rovers who use the 3G Arena in Galashiels as their home ground are a good example of this. Since the club moved all training and games onto the 3G surface in 2012 they have recorded an impressive growth of players and an increased number of teams with over 300 players of all ages and abilities now playing on a weekly basis.

Gala Fairydean Rovers chairman, Kevin Temple notes "The 3G facility has been fantastic for the growth of the club over the past 4 years. Not only has quality of coaching improved through using a fantastic surface, we are lucky to have continuity by playing regularly and not having games & training sessions called off in poor weather."

- 4.8 New pitches also include specialised shockpad layers which cushions players' joints and absorbs impact to reduce the risk of injury, which can often be the case on hard and dry pitches over the summer months.
- 4.9 From an operational perspective, the cleaning and maintenance requirements of artificial surfaces are also much simpler than those of a natural grass pitch.
- 4.10 **Drew Kelly, Scottish Football Association Development Officer for the Scottish Borders** states that *"3G synthetic surfaces allow young people to access facilities that encourage them to lead healthy and happy lives. The fact these pitches can be used for football, rugby and depending on the surface hockey, means the encouragement of the next generation of sportsmen and women to develop their full potential."*
- 4.11 **Alastair Chalmers, Scottish Rugby Union Youth and Schools Manager for the East Region** goes on to say that artificial pitches *"allow multiple use over a weekend period that normal grass pitches would often struggle to cope with during the winter months. They provide a consistent surface that not only allows games to go ahead, but allows for teams to train and develop a wider, faster more exciting game for both the participants and spectators. Clearly they are not the only solution, but for me they are a big part to getting more people, more active, more often"*

5 Costs

- 5.1 Construction of the pitches is funded by SBC and Sportscotland with Live Borders assuming operating responsibility for each of the pitches with commensurate management fee for doing so. The 3G Arena in Galashiels does not receive any management fee support.

Construction costs are not included in this paper and the focus is on the ongoing operating costs of the 3G pitches.

- 5.2 Table 3 reports annual income and expenditure for the Galashiels pitch for the 2015/16 financial year. The Hawick pitch is based on projected figures for year 1 of operation as it has only been operating for a matter of weeks.

Table 3: Financial overview for the 3G pitches

Locality	Income	Expenditure	Net
Galashiels	£70k	£79k	(£9k)
Hawick	£33k	£49k	(£16k)
Total	£103k	£128k	(£25k)

NB: Galashiels 3G does not receive any management fee from SBC. The expenditure totals for Galashiels include operation of a small 5-a-side pitch located on the site plus club rooms and bar facilities.

6 Other Notes of Interest

- 6.1 From time to time concerns are raised in the media as to the safety or environmental risks associated with these pitches and their constituent parts.
- 6.2 Both the Scottish Football Association and Scottish Rugby Union adheres to the latest independent evidence that indicates that 3G pitches in the UK, which are built to industry-standard specifications, are safe.
- 6.3 Both of our 3G pitches are certified to FIFA and World Rugby (formerly IRB) test standards ensuring the pitches meet the specification requirements for both football and rugby at all times.
- 6.4 A report in the British Medical Journal in 2010, entitled '*Risk of injury on third generation artificial turf in Norwegian professional football*' determined no significant difference in injury location, type or severity between turf types. 17.1 injuries per 1000 match hours on natural grass and 17.6 injuries per 1000 match hours on artificial turf.
- 6.5 The number of reported accidents at the 3G Arena in Galashiels remain extremely low with less than 1 reported accident per 10,000 visits for the 2015/16 reporting period.
- 6.6 Scottish Premiership Football clubs Hamilton and Kilmarnock have both now installed artificial pitches at their grounds along with a host of professional rugby clubs including Glasgow Warriors and Saracens. The Borders and East Lothian Region Rugby Academy also use the 3G pitch in Galashiels for training and matches.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 There is no doubt that improved playing surfaces will help the sustainability of local clubs through increased participation levels.
- 7.2 There is often debate about whether natural grass is better for competitive football and rugby at the highest level however the view from professional sport can often be focussed on the requirements and resources available to them. Professional clubs invest significant resources into their grass pitches which amateur clubs and local authorities rarely have the opportunity to do.
- 7.3 There are many benefits that artificial surfaces bring, playing an integral part in providing greater opportunities for all ages, genders and abilities to participate in sport and physical activity on a more regular basis.

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