

HALEWOOD TOWN JUNIORS FC PLAYING FIELD MITIGATION – PRE-PLANNING APPLICATION SUPPORT

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QUALITY, INTEGRITY, PROFESSIONALISM

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1: INTRODUCTION

This report, commissioned by Knowsley Council and produced by Knight, Kavanagh & Page (KKP) considers how the proposed loss of playing field and associated mitigation of the Halewood Town Juniors FC site can meet National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) guidance and Sport England Playing Field Policy.

The report is intended to support the Council's pre-planning application for the proposal.

Background context

The Government has confirmed that Knowsley Council has been awarded £15.3 million from Round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund for major improvements in Halewood. Knowsley's bid for Halewood was focussed on providing additional facilities and infrastructure to support existing and new residents of the town. The plans include an improved retail and leisure offer to meet demand.

Halewood is an important town within Knowsley and has significant proposals for growth with its population set to grow by 20% following the delivery of the East of Halewood development site - which will include approximately 1,500 homes over the next 10 years.

Halewood's Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid aims to enhance recreational, leisure, and sustainable transport facilities based on resident feedback from the East of Halewood masterplan consultation.

Key proposed projects include:

- ◀ Improved cycling and walking routes for better connectivity between the new housing, Wood Road Green Space (Grace Park), Finch Woods, the Leisure Centre, the district centre, and local employment and leisure facilities.
- ◀ New and upgraded playing pitches and open spaces at Wood Road Green Space (Grace Park).
- ◀ Enhanced all-weather playing pitches and upgrades to sports and leisure facilities, including decarbonisation of the existing Halewood Leisure Centre.
- ◀ Development of an improved district centre to create and sustain local jobs, with an expanded retail and commercial area funded by the private sector.

These improvements aim to address health inequalities, increasing levels of physical activity, addressing climate emergency challenges, and connectivity and employment access issues, contributing to the overall "levelling up" of Halewood.

As a result of the above, there is a need to develop on the existing Halewood Town Juniors FC site as well as the wider area of Grace Park. A full masterplan has been developed which will see the reprovisioning of football provision provided as part of the wider development with new ancillary facilities and 3G pitches provided (in replacement of grass pitches). The masterplan has been subject to public consultation, of which details can be found here:

<https://www.knowsleynews.co.uk/the-future-for-halewood-your-views/>

Included within the masterplan and LUF bid are wider improvements to Halewood Leisure Centre which include a new cycle path and improved walking routes for pedestrians. The project will also see new small sided artificial pitches developed to cater for local recreational demand for football and other sports.

This development will be assessed against NPPF and Sport England Playing Field Policy guidance.

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KKP has therefore suggested that a two-phase approach is required to support the Council's pre-planning application.

Key statistics¹

Four of the 15 LSOAs comprising and surrounding Halewood are in the most deprived decile in England. Five are in the top decile for health deprivation. Halewood South is a "left behind area" according to the Local Trust.

Public Health data shows that health outcomes in Halewood are worse than in England overall: Life expectancy for men is lower in Halewood South (77.6) than in England overall (79.7). For women, life expectancy is also lower. The rates of death before 75, incidence of cancer, incidence of lung cancer, and rates of limiting long-term illnesses or disabilities are all higher in Halewood South than in England. 36.9% of people in Knowsley say they are inactive, taking less than 30mins of activity per week, compared to 27.2% in England.

Halewood has inadequate walking and cycling opportunities. Local journeys are imbalanced towards car use, and there are challenges to walking and cycling in much of Halewood: Nine of the 15 Halewood LSOAs have longer walking journey times than the England average to the eight key services (as defined by the DfT). Eight of the LSOAs have equal to or worse journey times to key services by cycling than the England average. The Knowsley Local Plan recognises the need to develop sustainable transport infrastructure, in recognition of the isolation of Halewood from other parts of the Borough.

Planning context

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Paragraph 103 states that "Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless":

- (a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- (b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- (c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

Sport England's Playing Field Policy

To help protect the spaces where people get active, local planning authorities are required by law to consult Sport England on planning applications they receive which affect playing fields. Sport England's Playing Field Policy helps it to assess and respond to these applications. Sport England also provides publicly available guidance alongside its Playing Fields Policy to give clarity and advice to external parties on how we make individual assessments.

As the proposed development includes the loss of playing field land, Sport England will expect to be consulted. Sport England is a statutory consultee on applications effecting playing field which have been used in the last five years and a non-statutory consultee on playing field sites which are older than this.

¹ Statics are based on information provided in the Knowsley Levelling Up Fund Bid Application: [Levelling Up: Halewood - Invest Knowsley](#)

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On any application Sport England will assess the development against one of its five policy exceptions:

- ◀ **Exception 1 (E1): Excess of provision**
 - ◀ A robust and up-to-date assessment has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of Sport England, that there is an excess of playing field provision in the catchment, which will remain the case should the development be permitted, and the site has no special significance to the interests of sport.
- ◀ **Exception 2 (E2): Ancillary development**
 - ◀ The proposed development is for ancillary facilities supporting the principal use of the site as a playing field and does not affect the quantity or quality of playing pitches or otherwise adversely affect their use.
- ◀ **Exception 3 (E3): Land incapable of forming part of a pitch**
 - ◀ The proposed development affects only land incapable of forming part of a playing pitch and does not:
 - ◀ reduce the size of any playing pitch;
 - ◀ result in the inability to use any playing pitch (including the maintenance of adequate safety margins and run-off areas);
 - ◀ reduce the sporting capacity of the playing field to accommodate playing pitches or the capability to rotate or reposition playing pitches to maintain their quality;
 - ◀ result in the loss of other sporting provision or ancillary facilities on the site; or
 - ◀ prejudice the use of any remaining areas of playing field on the site.
- ◀ **Exception 4 (E4): Replacement provision of equivalent or better quality and quantity**
 - ◀ The area of playing field to be lost as a result of the proposed development will be replaced, prior to the commencement of development, by a new area of playing field:
 - ◀ of equivalent or better quality, and
 - ◀ of equivalent or greater quantity, and
 - ◀ in a suitable location, and
 - ◀ subject to equivalent or better accessibility and management arrangements.
- ◀ **Exception 5 (E5): New sports provision benefit outweighs the loss of the playing field.**
 - ◀ The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor facility for sport, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss, or prejudice to the use, of the area of playing field.

The full explanation and conditions of each exception is available via the link below:

[Link to Sport England Playing Fields Policy](#)

Local context

The Knowsley Local Plan

The Core Strategy part of the Local Plan will set the strategic framework for the growth and development of Knowsley up to 2028 and beyond. It sets out how and where new development and regeneration should take place and will therefore promote, guide and manage the future development of the Borough.

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Policy CS21 reflects the importance of protecting and conserving greenspaces to meet local requirements for quantity, quality and accessibility which satisfy both current and future needs for residents and visitors. This includes playing field.

Knowsley 2030: A long-term strategy for Knowsley

Knowsley 2030 presents the Council's vision for the Borough and has five priorities to make Knowsley:

- ✦ A place with welcoming, vibrant, well-connected neighbourhoods and town centres;
- ✦ A place with a thriving, inclusive economy, with opportunities for people and business;
- ✦ A place where people are active and healthy, and have access to the support they need;
- ✦ A place where people of all ages are confident and can achieve their full potential; and,
- ✦ A place where strong and safe communities can shape their future.

Knowsley Climate Emergency Action Plan

In January 2020, Knowsley Council declared a Climate Emergency and made a commitment to develop a Climate Emergency Action plan with the aim of achieving net zero carbon emissions from the Council's estates and services by 2040.

A further commitment was made to work with partner agencies across Liverpool City Region to reduce carbon emissions across the Borough.

The Climate Emergency Action Plan identified key areas for action where carbon emissions can be reduced as far as possible and 10 key themes have been identified, one of which is Theme 1 – Green Spaces for Carbon Offsetting and Climate Resilience. Projects such as completing existing tree planting, identifying new opportunities for tree planting and protecting designated parks and green spaces from future development all come under this Theme.

Knowsley Social Value Framework

This social value framework will support the vision, priorities and actions of the Council's corporate plan to make Knowsley the "Borough of Choice" and support the outcomes the Council wants to deliver:

- ✦ Maximise the Council's Contribution to Education in Knowsley.
- ✦ Maximise the Council's Contribution to the Health and Wellbeing of.
- ✦ Knowsley Residents.
- ✦ Provide High Quality and Sustainable Adult Social Care.
- ✦ Accelerate Business Growth, New Jobs and New Housing.
- ✦ Create a Sustainable Borough.

Knowsley Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS)

The Knowsley PPOSS was completed in September 2021 and was checked, challenged and approved by strategic partners which include Knowsley Council, Sport England, Liverpool County FA, the Football Foundation, and other national governing bodies of sport.

It evidences the supply and demand position for playing pitches, artificial grass pitches and other outdoor sports both currently and into the future through to 2028. It also provides a breakdown on a borough level and a Halewood Analysis Area level (as one of the sub areas of Knowsley). Full findings of the PPOSS are identified in section three of this report.

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2: PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposal within Knowsley Council's Levelling Up Bid is for the comprehensive rejuvenation of Grace Park and Halewood Town Juniors FC. At present these are two separate sites split by a fence and a treeline. The football part of the site is leased to the Halewood Town Juniors FC on a long-term arrangement. The football part of the overall site is 2.55 hectares.

The football offer has been produced specifically for Halewood Town Juniors FC which is a local and well-established community football club which has been regularly consulted on the design phase of this work by the Council.

Consultation with the Club (undertaken by Knowsley Council) identifies the following statistics from the 23/24 football season:

- ◆ 30 postponed or cancelled games for the club's Saturday junior teams.
- ◆ A similar amount of postponed or cancelled games for their Sunday junior teams.
- ◆ 12 weeks of training lost for their youngest players.

The Club (based on 22-23 season data) has 13 competitive teams and operates a range of football programmes for young children. Of these, most play at central venues (on 3G pitches) based at the Halewood Leisure Centre and the Arncliffe Sports & Community Centre. This is a result of the central venue nature of local football leagues for mini and youth football in the Merseyside area.

Five of the Club's teams typically use Halewood Town Juniors FC site for match play purposes, but it also is used for recreational sessions which are operated by the Club for young children. This extends itself to the FA's Wildcats sessions and a new offer for disabled participants.

The Club has a vision for the newly proposed site to be used as a football hub to create added social community value (through the delivery of its existing football-led sessions and the utilisation of a new ancillary offer) and to increase the level at which it currently operates. This can only be achieved on new 3G pitches, as the grass pitches are unable to provide a sufficient level of capacity to accommodate such usage levels.

Given existing growth of football locally, 3G pitches will also have a role to play in accommodating central venue demand from local leagues at peak times (weekends) which are already operating within Halewood. Liverpool CFA reports that the league struggles to fully accommodate all demand at Halewood Leisure Centre's 3G pitch, and would like to expand.

Liverpool County FA (July 2024) states that the Halewood Junior League which operates as a central venue at Halewood Centre is substantially oversubscribed and requires additional access to 3G pitches for weekend match play purposes.

On this basis, all Halewood Town Juniors FC teams which currently play at central venue sites would play at the newly proposed football hub at Grace Park and operate it as an additional central venue site using the pitch as an overspill facility for those leagues.

From a midweek training perspective, the Club's 13 teams are scattered across 3G pitches in south Liverpool and Knowsley, and it aspires to consolidate this on one site within its catchment area. This demand would equate to a substantial level of programmed midweek use.

To exacerbate the issue for local 3G pitch need, the Knowsley PPS identifies that the 3G pitch at Halewood Academy, which is well used for training and a level of match play, is at the end of its life and at some point, in the future will fall out of use for community offer.

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Whilst it is contractually obligated to resurface the pitch as part of its PFI agreement, it is understood by KKP that this is not likely to be done in the short term. This will make the importance of the proposed pitches crucial for accommodating local demand.

The football site sits adjacent to Grace Park and is separated by a small fence and treeline. It is important to understand that Grace Park does not and has not historically accommodated playing pitches and is not playing field. Its main purposes are to serve as a green amenity greenspace for residents. A Google Earth imagery timelapse will show this to be the case.

Figure 2.1: Grace Park and Halewood Town Juniors FC

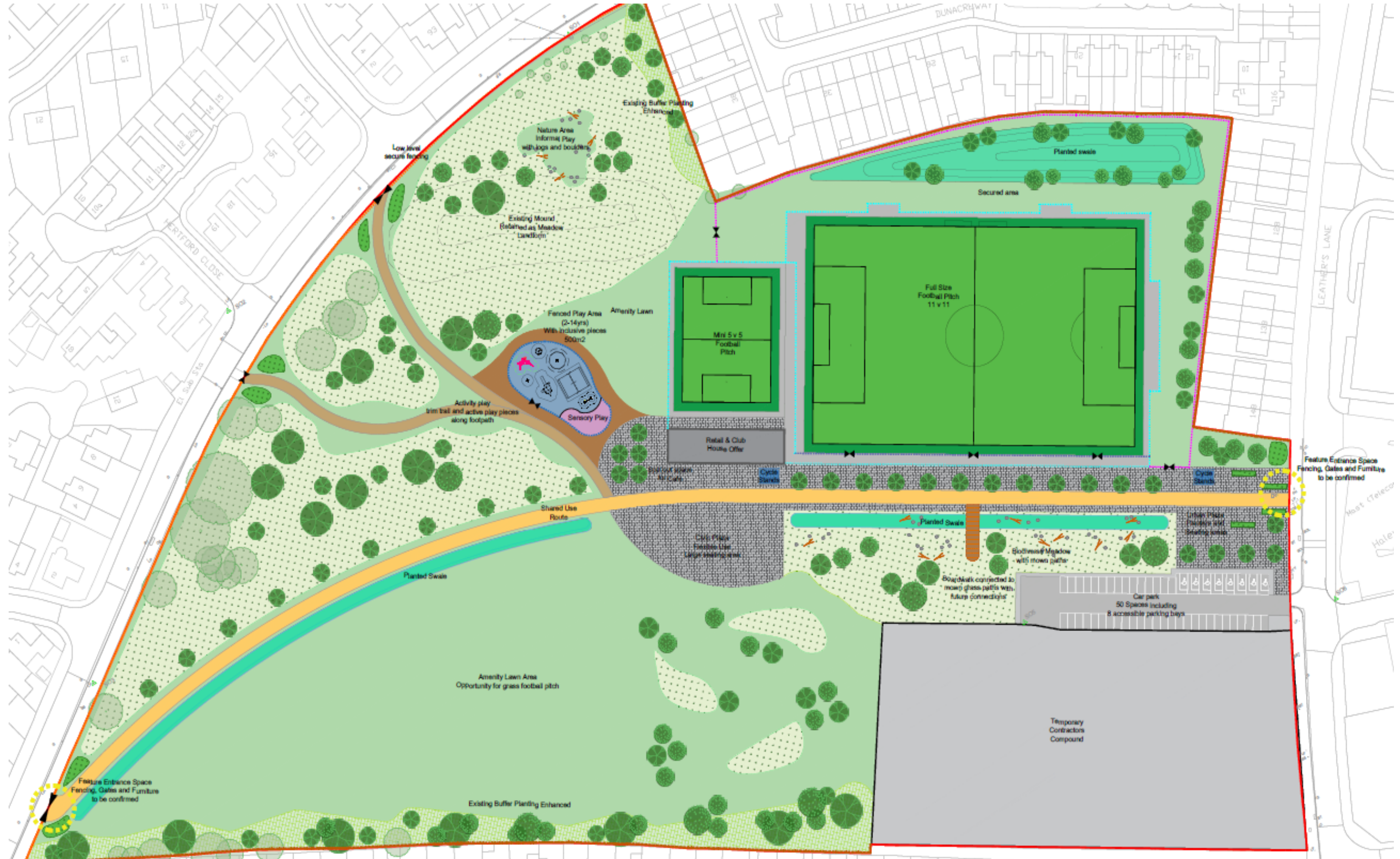


The Knowsley PPOSS (2021) identifies the football site as accommodating grass pitches marked out as one adult, two youth and one mini football which are a mixture of standard and poor quality. Since the PPOSS was developed there has been a reduction in the number of football pitches marked on the site because of quality issues and pitches not being usable. As a reminder, the total hectareage of the existing football site is 2.55 hectares.

The site has historically suffered from issues relating to waterlogging and an inability for matches to be played throughout the regular playing season due to unfit playing pitches. There are also areas of the site which are overgrown and not prepared as playing field due to not being suitable for use.

There is also a small power substation on the site which further reduces the ability to mark football pitches. The site has no substantial ancillary provision (including car parking), and its only offer is a steel shipping container which has been converted to provide a small (and largely inadequate, due to the scale of demand on the site) social room.

Figure 2.2 Grace Park masterplan



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The masterplan (which is shown in Figure 2.2) shows that the following elements will be implemented within the scheme:

- ◀ Cycleway
- ◀ Footpath
- ◀ Tables and benches
- ◀ Bike repair station
- ◀ Wetland area

This design specification has been developed to tackle identified health and deprivation inequalities in Halewood. This is through an improved football (and wider sport offer where applicable) but also through providing wider opportunities for walking and cycling as well as improving the wider area

From a football perspective, the proposed mitigation replacement for loss of the Halewood Town Juniors FC site is proposed as follows:

- ◀ A new clubhouse and changing rooms (meeting appropriate FA design specifications).
- ◀ An 11v11 3G football pitch (FA certified for match play purposes).
- ◀ An accompanying 5v5 3G football pitch (FA certified for match play purposes).
- ◀ Accessible toilet provision.
- ◀ Changing provision for officials
- ◀ A changing room with lockers to allow staggered use of 3G pitches.
- ◀ Large car park (50 spaces and contractor compound - delivered as part of the wider-site masterplan).

The proposed 11v11 and 5v5 3G pitch (with accompanying ancillary facilities) will provide a high-quality offer for community football. Whilst still to be fully confirmed, there is no question about the extent of community availability of the pitches when developed. It is expected that the 3G pitches on the site would provide the following benefits to the football club and residents:

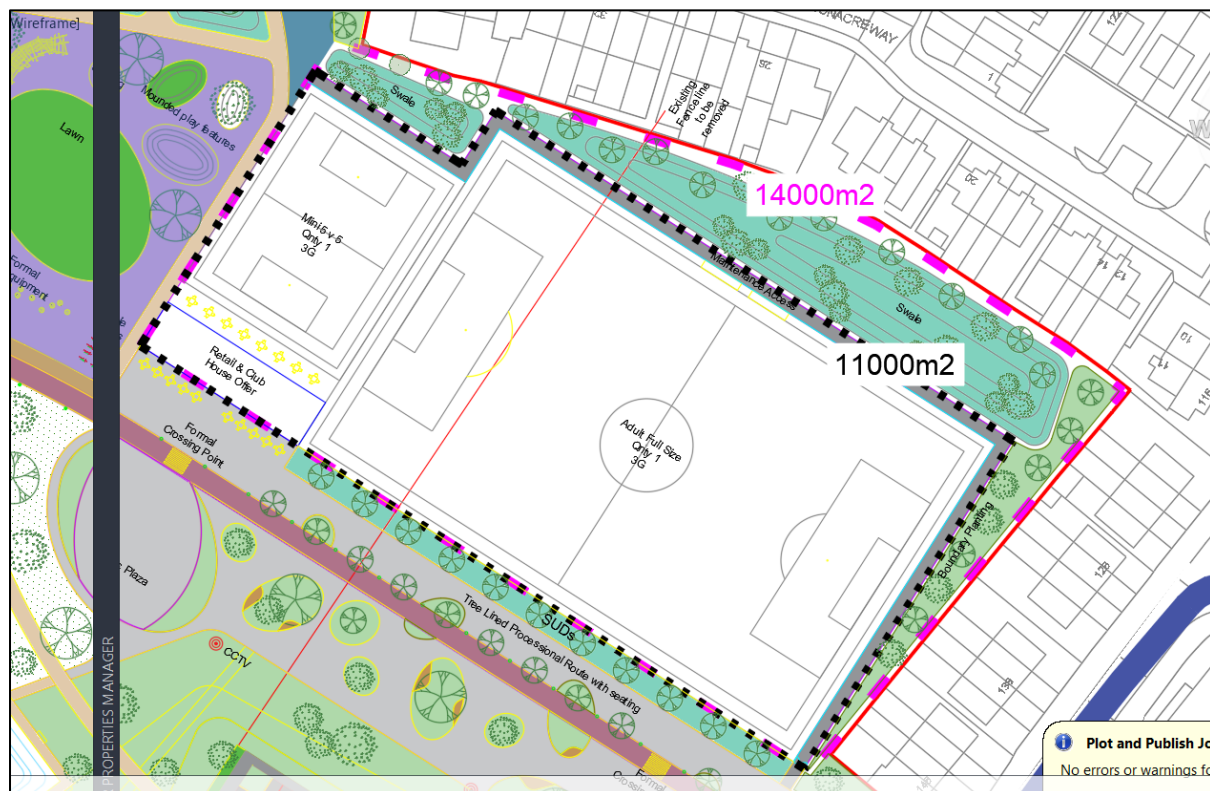
- ◀ It will provide a high-quality multi-sport offer for community football.
- ◀ It will provide an increased capacity of use on the site from a current circa 1-2 matches per week to a proposed 37 peak-time hours (20 Monday-Friday 17.00-21.00 and 17 on Saturdays and Sundays (10.00-20:00 Saturday and 10:00 – 17:00 Sunday) plus other daytime use on the new 3G pitches (catering for a wide range of user groups) concurrently relieving the pressure on other grass/3G facilities in the Halewood area and south Liverpool area.
- ◀ It could allow the theoretical expansion of the Merseyside Youth League which also uses the existing 3G pitch at Halewood Leisure Centre as a central venue.
- ◀ Development of ancillary provision will promote increased pitch usage, and the associated facilities will enhance the social experience of players, parents and coaches.
- ◀ It has the potential to accommodate a wide range of social programming orchestrated by Everton in the Community.
- ◀ It will enhance Knowsley Council's plans to heighten the aspirations of young people through football and reduce physical activity locally in Halewood.
- ◀ It will increase levels of physical activity in the local area from both a competitive and social position, meeting outcomes set out in Sport England's Uniting the Movement Strategy.

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It is expected that the following opening times will be established:

- 37 peak time community use hours per week (20 hours Monday-Friday 17.00-21.00 and 20 on Saturdays and Sundays (10.00-17.00).
- An expected 40 hours of potential midweek use - all weekday daytime-based between 09.00-17.00.

Figure 2.3: Proposed area for mitigation



The total hectareage of the new football site (based on current designs) is expected to be 1.1 hectares (or 1.4 hectares if including the surrounding sustainable drainage system). **This is a circa 1.45-hectare loss of playing field land (or 1.15 hectare if accounting for the drainage system)** in comparison to the existing site identified in figure 2.1.

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3: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Natural turf playing field can accommodate a range of sports and as such provides a genuine multi-purpose function for sport. It is important that prior to the loss of any playing field that any deficiencies for it are considered before development commences.

The findings of the PPOSS are detailed below. The PPOSS confirms that as there is no other pitch sport demand present in Knowsley, this reduces demand for any proposed 3G pitches to be able to provide wider multi-sport opportunities.

Table 1.1: Quantitative headline findings

Sport	Halewood	Pitch type	Current capacity total in MES	Future capacity total in MES (2028)
Football (grass)	Halewood	Adult	Spare capacity of 0.5	At capacity
Football (grass)	Halewood	Youth 11v11	At capacity	Shortfall of 0.5
Football (grass)	Halewood	Youth 9v9	Spare capacity of 2	Spare capacity of 2
Football (grass)	Halewood	Mini 7v7	Spare capacity of 1.5	At capacity
Football (grass)	Halewood	Mini 5v5	Spare capacity of 3	Spare capacity of 3
	Borough-wide			
Football (grass)	Knowsley	Adult	Spare capacity of 6	Spare capacity of 4.5
Football (grass)	Knowsley	Youth 11v11	Shortfall of 2 MES	Shortfall of 3.5
Football (grass)	Knowsley	Youth 9v9	Spare capacity of 2	Shortfall of 1
Football (grass)	Knowsley	Mini 7v7	Spare capacity of 3	Spare capacity of 1
Football (grass)	Knowsley	Mini 5v5	Spare capacity of 4.5	Spare capacity of 2.5
3G pitches	Halewood	11v11	No current shortfall	No future shortfall
3G pitches	Knowsley	11v11	Existing pitches near or at capacity.	Shortfall equating to 11.5 hours per week.

PPOSS summary

The PPOSS shows the following position for Halewood Analysis Area:

- ✦ There is a sufficient supply of adult football pitches both now and in the future.
- ✦ There is currently a sufficient supply of youth 11v11 football pitches with a small shortfall emerging in the future.
- ✦ There is a sufficient supply of youth 9v9 football pitches both now and in the future.
- ✦ There is a sufficient supply of both formats of mini football pitches both now and in the future.
- ✦ There is not a shortfall of 3G pitches².

One of the core PPOSS recommendations (based on a catch all borough-wide level) is that because there are identified shortfalls on grass pitches (mainly in alternate sub-areas to Halewood) that there is a need to protect both playing pitch provision currently in use and pitches that are no longer in use due to the potential that they may offer for meeting current and future needs. However, in Halewood there is currently a sufficient supply of provision of grass football pitches with actual spare capacity amounting to seven match equivalent sessions per week across all pitch types.

² This position has been updated following a separate Needs Assessment undertaken in 2023.

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Halewood - 3G pitch needs assessment 2023

In December 2023, Knowsley Council commissioned KKP to update its evidence base on 3G pitches specifically for Halewood. The analysis used updated football affiliation data (to that used within its own PPS) and considered the Halewood position in relation to neighbouring authorities and the increase of football demand across the area. This has enabled the accurate assessment to be determined in relation to the need for 3G pitches within Halewood.

The outcome of this update concluded the following:

- ◆ Demand from Knowsley alone does not constitute a large enough shortfall to warrant demand for a full-size pitch to be built. However, it does generate enough demand for a small size (9v9) 3G pitch.
- ◆ To justify enough demand for a full size 3G pitch in Knowsley, it would need to accommodate demand which originates from outside of Knowsley i.e., South Liverpool or Halton (i.e. also be reliant upon imported demand). There would need to be a level of comfort that recent increased demand in Halton and South Liverpool does not generate aspirations/plans within those respective authorities.
- ◆ Any full size 3G pitch development taking place in Knowsley would be required to have a comprehensive programme of use in place. It will be essential this considers demand from outside of the Knowsley authoritative boundary.

Summary

The net increase in capacity on the proposed site will rise from that of cumulative (across all grass pitches identified on the site in the PPS) 10 hours per week to a combined total of c. 80 hours per week. The proposed 3G pitches will allow for an increased level of site utilisation for match play, training and allow for an increased level of recreational and informal sessions to take place.

New 3G pitches will be able to provide a wider offer for Halewood to participate in all formats of football and provide wider opportunities for social value to be sustained by existing programmes but also achieved by other nearby organisations such as Everton in the Community.

If all grass pitches on the site (using the baseline of those identified within the Knowsley PPS) were improved to good quality (using the PPS Guidance) then the maximum cumulative hours of use across the site would increase to around 20 hours per week.

Full improvement of the grass pitches on site would still result in a 60-hour net loss of potential site utilisation which when compared to the 3G pitch option, on this basis, based on both traditional and social outcomes which can be achieved. As such, on weight of balance, it can be determined that the 3G option is most suitable for the Club.

The reduction in grass pitches which are at the site will not negatively impact the supply and demand balance of the local picture in Halewood based on the evidence presented in the Knowsley PPS. Spare capacity on the full-size pitch at the existing Halewood Town Junior FC site was discounted in the Knowsley PPS due to poor quality.

In addition, if all existing pitches on the site were included as good quality within the football capacity analysis in the Knowsley PPS the overall supply and demand balance would still show spare capacity if those pitches were removed.

4: POLICY POSITION

Based on the information provided about the site in this report it is considered that two Sport England Playing Fields Policy exceptions combine to provide sufficient justification for the application proposals to be approved. Exception 1 and Exception 2 are not considered by KKP to be applicable to the application and it is considered that meeting policy Exception 3 and Exception 5 nullifies the requirement to meet Exception 4.

The two relevant exceptions are as follows:

- ◀ **Exception 3 (E3): Land incapable of forming part of a pitch**
 - ◀ The proposed development affects only land incapable of forming part of a playing pitch and does not:
 - ◀ reduce the size of any playing pitch;
 - ◀ result in the inability to use any playing pitch (including the maintenance of adequate safety margins and run-off areas);
 - ◀ reduce the sporting capacity of the playing field to accommodate playing pitches or the capability to rotate or reposition playing pitches to maintain their quality;
 - ◀ result in the loss of other sporting provision or ancillary facilities on the site; or
 - ◀ prejudice the use of any remaining areas of playing field on the site.
 - ◀ subject to equivalent or better accessibility and management arrangements.

The applicant contends that there are large quantities of grass land at the site which are not fit nor suitable to be considered playing field. An estimate by the Club suggests that over a hectare of the site is not fit for use and would require substantial investment to bring it into any useable offer.

These segments, viewable on Google Earth, have not been used for football since the Club has been on the site (it took its leasehold from the Council in 2017). Furthermore, certain elements have tried to be used and had purpose-built drainage installed to try and improve the position, but this has failed and is now not used for any purpose.

Prior to a full application being determined the **applicant will agree to an independent agronomist undertaking a full assessment of the site (if this is a requirement of Sport England)** so that a full position on what is (and is not) playing field is established and it can be determined to what extent Policy Exception E3 needs to be met.

- ◀ **Exception 5 (E5): New sports provision benefit outweighs the loss of the playing field.**
 - ◀ The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor facility for sport, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss, or prejudice to the use, of the area of playing field.

It is the view of the applicant that the proposed 3G pitches at Halewood Town Juniors FC qualifies to meet this exception in the following ways:

- ◀ It will provide a high-quality multi-sport offer for community football.
- ◀ It will provide an increased capacity of use on the site from a current maximum of 10 hours per week to a proposed 37 peak-time hours (20 Monday-Friday 17.00-21.00 and 17 on Saturdays and Sundays (10.00-17.00) plus other daytime use on the new 3G pitches (catering for a wide range of user groups) concurrently relieving the pressure on other grass/3G facilities in the Halewood area and south Liverpool area.
- ◀ It could allow the theoretical expansion of the Merseyside Youth League and Merseyside & Halewood Sunday League which also uses the existing 3G pitch at Halewood Leisure Centre as a central venue.

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- ◀ Development of ancillary provision will promote increased pitch usage and the associated facilities will enhance the social experience of players, parents and coaches.
- ◀ It has the potential to accommodate a wide range of social programming orchestrated by Everton in the Community.
- ◀ It will enhance Knowsley Council's plans to heighten the aspirations of young people through football and reduce physical activity locally in Halewood.
- ◀ It will increase levels of physical activity in the local area from both a competitive and social position, meeting outcomes set out in Sport England's Uniting the Movement Strategy.

Based on the above points, the proposed facility provides a significant uplift to sporting opportunity - primarily for Knowsley residents and for the highly deprived local catchments. It will enable recreational, training and competitive opportunities for community football which are currently limited due to existing poor facilities and could never be provided on the grass pitches. On this basis, it is considered by the applicant that this policy exception is met via this proposal to replace grass pitches with 3G pitches and the associated built infrastructure.

5: CONCLUSION

The current proposal may present two issues in relation to meeting Sport England Playing Fields Policy that may need to be overcome. These are that proposed mitigation does not quite cover the total loss of playing field in hectares and secondly the loss of grass pitches through re-provision of 3G pitches.

In the view of the applicant and the Club, the reduction of grass pitches is not disadvantageous to the current or future operation of the site for match play or any other purposes due to the overwhelmingly proportion of low-quality playing field at the site. This is further substantiated by the known need for 11v11 3G pitches locally for both training and central venue match play purposes.

Based on available evidence presented in this report it is considered by KKP that Policy Exceptions 3 and 5 are the most applicable in meeting Sport England Playing Fields Policy.

The existing site is 2.55 hectares in size; however, large areas of the land have not been historically used as playing field as it is unfit to be so. Furthermore, other areas which have been attempted to be used have stopped being used due to issues relating to constant waterlogging. The proposal will result in the net loss of **1.15 to 1.45 hectares** of combined playing field and unusable areas of the site.

On this basis, the applicant believes that there is a case to be made for Policy Exception 3 to be met once an independent agronomist has confirmed the position on the site (if Sport England request this to be undertaken). This will vindicate those areas (and a level of hectareage) of the site should be accepted to meet the policy exception. Furthermore, it should ensure confidence that the mitigation proposal which has a smaller overall footprint is permissible.

For the secondary position of grass pitches being lost and mitigated for with all-weather pitches and associated facilities and infrastructure it is considered that Policy Exception 5 can be met due to:

- ◀ All 13 teams of Halewood Town Juniors FC site could be accommodated on the newly proposed site but there would be increased opportunities for match play, training and recreational programmes which are not at a risk of regular cancellation.
- ◀ There has been an independent needs assessment undertaken which justifies the need for additional 3G pitches in the locality.
- ◀ The 3G pitches will reduce a localised shortfall and provide increased opportunities for players and Halewood residents.
- ◀ An expected programme of use (to be established) will see a net increase in opportunity for competitive and recreational football sessions.
- ◀ Opportunities will be available for key local groups such as Everton in the Community to deliver sessions which promote localised social value.
- ◀ Provision will be made available to local schools – if they have an interest in using provision.
- ◀ A suitable sinking fund for future pitch replacement will be established, thus making the pitches sustainable in the long term.
- ◀ The changing room and overall clubhouse design will allow a flexible turnover of use for the 3G pitches.
- ◀ The 3G pitches will provide a significant increase in usage of the site.
- ◀ A new car park offer being provided to serve the football club (as part of the wider site).
- ◀ A reduction in grass pitches at the existing site will not negatively impact the football grass pitch supply and demand balance locally due to the overall spare capacity in Halewood.