

Extract from minutes of –

MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

12th March 2024

**“Blanchflower Stadium –
Preferential Use Agreement**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of this Committee that the Preferential Use Agreement with Glentoran Football Club for the use of the second synthetic pitch at Blanchflower Playing Fields, expired on 1 December 2023.**
- 1.2 Outside the timeslots allocated to Glentoran the facility is very popular and continues to be fully booked from 6pm to 10pm Monday to Thursday by a wide range of youth and senior teams.**
- 1.3 On Friday evenings along with Saturday mornings and on Sunday the pitch is booked by South Belfast Youth League**
- 1.4 Council have been approached by several local, community based clubs who are unable to gain access to the pitch.**
- 1.5 There are a number of options for Council to consider regarding the future booking arrangements for this pitch:**

Option 1

To renew the Preferential Use Agreement with Glentoran Football Club

Option 2

To process all pitch bookings at the site following normal Belfast City Council procedures which is first come, first served.

Option 3

To work with local community based football clubs to develop an allocation model so that they all get access to the pitch on Monday to Thursday evenings. An example of a potential allocation model involving 8 clubs and the South Belfast Youth League is included at appendix 1

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to note that the Preferential Use Agreement with Glentoran Football Club for Blanchflower Playing Fields has ended

2.2 From 1 April 2024 it is suggested that Council should progress with Option 3.

Council Officers will meet with local clubs to develop an allocation model so that they all get access to the pitch on Monday to Thursday evenings (see appendix 1)

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 In March 2018 Strategic Policy and Resources Committee directed officers to undertake research into the provision of suitable and convenient pitch facilities for Glentoran FC including its Youth Academy. Committee further accepted the East Area Working Group recommendation that a proposed capital programme to install a 3G pitch with floodlighting at King George V playing fields be replaced on the capital programme with a 3G pitch at Blanchflower Playing Fields.

3.2 People and Communities Committee of March 2019 agreed to upgrade facilities at King George V Playing Fields and offer a preferential Use Agreement for 5 years to Glentoran Youth Academy.

3.3 King George V playing fields are subject to a Deed of Covenant with Fields of Trust. Local residents had written to Fields in Trust in opposition to the proposed development of the site and management of bookings. Local residents also approached council officers protesting against the proposal on a number of grounds.

- 3.4 In the meantime significant investment in football facilities had taken place in East Belfast and in particular at Blanchflower Playing Fields where Council has developed two full size floodlit synthetic football pitches at Blanchflower Playing Fields. One of the pitches being directly managed and booked by Harland and Wolff Welders Football Club and the other managed and booked by Council
- 3.5 By 2019 the decision regarding the upgrade works had not been fulfilled approved Preferential Use Agreement at King George V Glentoran FC wrote to Council seeking approval for the previously approved Preferential Use Agreement at King George V playing fields to be transferred to Blanchflower playing fields.
- 3.6 Officers negotiated with Glentoran Football Club and an agreed timetable of priority use for Glentoran Football Club was produced, indicated in the table below. The timetable of use and the teams/sections from within the club using the pitch at these times were to be reflective of Glentoran Football Clubs commitment to growing the game in an inclusive way with significant usage by groups under-represented in sports participation.

Day	Times of Use
Monday	6:00pm-7:00pm 7:00pm -8:00pm
Tuesday	6:00pm-7:00pm 7:00pm -8:00pm
Wednesday	6:00pm-7:00pm 7:00pm -8:00pm
Thursday	6:00pm-7:00pm 7:00pm -8:00pm
Friday	None
Saturday	None
Sunday	None

- 3.7 People and Communities Committee of 9 November 2021 agreed to offer a Preferential Use Agreement to Glentoran Football Club at Blanchflower Playing Fields for limited access to the site, as identified in the table above, for a period of two years. This agreement has now ended and there have been enquiries from a number of local youth teams with regards to being able to book this pitch for the slots currently allocated to Glentoran through this agreement.

3.8 **Financial & Resource Implications**

There are no additional resource implications associated with this report.

3.9 **Equality Impact/Rural Needs Assessment**

There are no equality or rural needs implications associated with this report.”

The Committee noted that the Preferential Use Agreement with Glentoran Football Club for Blanchflower Playing Fields had ended with effect from 1st April 2024 and agreed that the Council should progress with Option 3.

At the request of a Member, it was further agreed that officers would look to work with local community based football clubs to develop an allocation model which was fair and equitable for all users, to ensure that all clubs would get fair access to pitches throughout the week.”