

Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	19 May 2025	
Report Title:	Decision to enter a contract through the Football Foundations PlayZones Framework to construct PlayZones at Barton Road and Manor Field	

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 In November 2024 Cabinet reviewed a report regarding the Football Foundation Project and the potential delivery of up to four PlayZones in Fenland, with two initially identified to be developed at the Manor Field in Whittlesey and at Barton Road Playing Field in Wisbech.
- 1.2 Cabinet approved the submission of bids to the Football Foundation for these two facilities.
- 1.3 Cabinet also noted the necessary match funding of £62,500 per facility and the planned funding applications to be submitted to the FCC community Action Fund to support the Manor project and Wisbech Town Board to support the Wisbech project.
- 1.4 This report highlights the current position of these two projects and details that the necessary match funding, previously identified, has not been forthcoming following rejection of a bid to FCC and the timetable changes for the Wisbech Town Board and the Government's Neighbourhood Plan funding. This report therefore asks Cabinet to consider supportive match funding the two projects from FDC's capital programme.
- 1.5 This report also asks Cabinet to consider whether support for two other possible PlayZone locations – should Football Foundation funding become available – whilst noting that it is likely that match funding for the facilities would be necessary from the District Council once again.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Working together with the Football Foundation, community consultation has taken place in 4 locations, with a further location identified also by the Football Foundation. This has led to a two-tranche approach, suggested by the Football Foundation, of developing two facilities initially in Barton Road, Wisbech and on the Manor Field, Whittlesey to be delivered in summer 2025.
- 2.2 Potentially, a further two facilities (Wisbech Park and a location in March or potentially Chatteris) will follow shortly afterwards. Initially a PlayZone on Estover Park in March was anticipated, but feedback from the Football Foundation indicates that a PlayZone in this location would not be supported and a different facility at Estover park is being considered.
- 2.3 Fenland's application to the Football Foundation for grant support for the Manor Field and Barton Road projects has been successful, with grants awarded as follows:

Fenland District Council: Fenland PlayZones - Manor Leisure Centre

- 2.4 The Football Foundation has approved a capital grant offer of 75% of a total project cost of £307,618.00, subject to a maximum payment of £226,692.71, to Fenland District Council towards Fenland PlayZones - Manor Leisure Centre.

Match funding of £80,925.29 will be required for this facility.

Fenland District Council: Fenland PlayZones - Barton Road Playing Fields

- 2.5 The Football Foundation has approved a capital grant offer of 75% of a total project cost of £299,956.00, subject to a maximum payment of £224,967.01, to Fenland District Council towards Fenland PlayZones - Barton Road Playing Fields.

The match funding of £74,988.99 will be required for this facility.

- 2.6 The total grant awarded is £451,660, against a total project capital cost of £607,574. The total match funding that would be required from Fenland District Council is £155,914.28.
- 2.7 As highlighted in the previous Cabinet report, should the match funding sources decline to support the projects then capital support to move forwards would be required from elsewhere or the projects cancelled. This is the case, and this paper seeks a decision from Cabinet regarding FDC support for the match funding requirements as detailed above from the Council's capital programme or cancelling the project.
- 2.8 Should the projects move forwards, FDC will facilitate the initial start up of the new PlayZones, after which the Council will look at longer-term options for the management and maintenance of the sites to include our existing leisure contract, Town Councils and local community groups and local sports clubs. Once the options are known, further information will be presented to decision makers to agree a way forward.
- 2.9 Fees for use of the facilities will ensure day to day running costs are covered and that the ongoing longer term financial viability of the facilities is in place. Fees will cover a 'sinking-fund' for the replacement of the surface in years 10 – 15. Fees will also allow funding for the Active Fenland Team to develop community sessions and deliver coaching qualifications at both facilities.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the report and the benefits that the development of PlayZones in Fenland will offer, namely;
- Increasing community physical activity levels and subsequently community health
 - Encouraging under-represented groups such as women and girls, disabled people and older people to become more physically active
 - Supporting a reduction in anti-social behaviour
 - Supporting community cohesion

- 3.2 That Cabinet notes the General Fund Budget Estimates and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report, agreed by Cabinet and Council in February, projects a financial shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.432m increasing year on year amounting to around £3.4m by 2027/28.

Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2025/26 and the MTFS, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address.

Any additional costs for items not already included in the budget will incur additional revenue costs of circa. £81k p.a. for every additional £1m required based on an assumed 30 year borrowing profile.

- 3.3 That Cabinet considers carefully the necessary match funding requirement of £80,925.29 for the Manor Field facility and the match funding requirement of £74,988.99 for the Barton Road facility and makes a decision to support the necessary match funding for *either both, one or neither facility*.
- 3.4 That Cabinet also identifies whether this project, if proceeding, is a capital project (as the original PlayZone report was dated November 2024), or whether this is now a Fenland Inspire! project.
- 3.5 That Cabinet, subject to the decision in paragraph 3.3, delegates authority to the Corporate Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Leisure and the Leader of the Council in his capacity as Portfolio Holder for Finance to develop the PlayZones as required in paragraph 3.3, through the Football Foundation PlayZones Framework and to award, mobilise and implement such proposal with further authority to take all reasonable ancillary actions to ensure implementation.
- 3.6 The Cabinet authorises the Monitoring Officer to execute and complete all requisite legal documentation in relation to the matters outlined above.
- 3.7 That Cabinet considers carefully whether to support any further bids to the Football Foundation for a PlayZone facility in Wisbech Park and a location in March or Chatteris and instructs officers accordingly, noting that any successful funding for two facilities will also be likely to require match funding from the Council in the region of £80,000 per facility if other funders declined to support the projects.

Wards Affected	Wisbech and Whittlesey	
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/06MAR25/01	
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Jan French Cllr Chris Boden	Portfolio Holder for Parks & Open Spaces Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance
Report Originator(s)	Phil Hughes	Head of Leisure Services
Contact Officer(s)	Carol Pilson Phil Hughes	Corporate Director Head of Leisure Services

Background Papers

[Cabinet Paper regarding PlayZones, November 2024](#)

<https://localplans.footballfoundation.org.uk/local-authorities-index/fenland/fenland-executive-summary/>

4 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 4.1 In 2022 the Football Foundation funded the [Fenland Local Football Facilities Plan](#). This assessed football facilities within the District and identified opportunities for development. The report's summary reads as follows; The key strengths of local football in Fenland include traditional football/league provision and it is recommended that this is sustained and also encouraged to grow further.
- 4.2 However, gaps in provision do exist, these include a lack of "Just Play" provision, and a need to develop additional opportunities for the female game. It was recommended that the future football development priorities for Fenland are:
- Establish Just Play opportunities; including vets provision, and a Disability Just Play Centre.
 - Provide additional programme support for growth in the female game.
 - Provision of recreational football opportunities in Wisbech.
 - Facility development to support high levels of participation in March and Wisbech.

Development of PlayZones will help to address the first three bullet points above.

- 4.3 The PlayZone Programme is the Football Foundation's investment programme aimed at tackling inequalities in physical activity and access to facilities by funding community-led spaces. The Football Foundation (FF) Playzones project is a collaborative initiative aimed at engaging with local communities across the country to create outstanding sports and activity spaces and tackle inequalities in participation. The FF aims to deliver up to 240 playzones in England in 2025. This is an ambitious target.
- 4.4 The programme is targeted at specific geographies due to need and Fenland has been selected as a District that will benefit from this significant investment. The project is funded by the Premier League, The FA, the Government, and Sport England, and is delivered by the Football Foundation.
- 4.5 The FF aims to focus investment and resource into communities with the greatest need. This will deliver new or refurbished outdoor mini pitches designed for football and other sports and activities that will allow priority groups to be more active.
- 4.6 PlayZones provide an inspiring and inclusive space for the community to gather, play sport and be active. The spaces need to be inspiring, accessible, engaging and welcoming for all priority groups. As such PlayZones have been

designed to be attractive, modern, and safe spaces that communities want to use, with branding and colour schemes to support that.

4.7 The Football Foundation has learned that the most successful community sport and physical activity spaces are designed and delivered in partnership with local people. Communities are more likely to take part in activities and use facilities if they've been included in their planning and development.

4.8 The Football Foundation is satisfied that a PlayZone facility at both Barton Road and the Manor Field would be successful projects. Infrastructure is located on the sites and local communities are familiar with the facilities, so uptake should be strong.

4.9 Wisbech Park

The Football Foundation visited the park whilst in the area. As there is already a hub for sports in the park, the FF has identified that enhancing this with a PlayZone, linked to a re-vitalised changing facility (currently dilapidated) and the local pavilion is a project that is viable. An application to FF for this facility may be possible, subject to FF internal funding decisions in mid to late 2025, subject to Cabinet wishing for such a facility to proceed.

4.10 Further to FF feedback, an application to FF for a facility in March, not at Estover Park, or in a suitable location in Chatteris may be possible in mid to late 2025, subject to internal FF funding decisions and subject to Cabinet wishing such an application to proceed.

4.11 Project Goals

The playzone project has several goals and offers local communities significant benefits:

- Increase participation in football and other sport and activities: By providing accessible and safe spaces to play, the project aims to encourage more children and young people to participate in football.
- Improve health and well-being: Regular physical activity, such as playing football, can help to improve children's physical and mental health.
- Reduce crime and antisocial behaviour: By providing positive activities for young people, the project can help to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour in local communities.
- Regenerate communities: The construction and development of Playzones can help to regenerate local communities and provide a focal point for residents.
- Promote social inclusion: Playzones are designed to be inclusive and welcoming to children and young people from all backgrounds.

4.12 Multi-sport

Although FF investment is football-led, it is important that other sports and activities benefit from the new facilities. PlayZones are designed not only for recreational football, including Premier League Kicks, FA Weetabix Wildcats and walking football programmes, but a whole host of other sports and activities, from basketball to netball, rugby, hockey, cricket and more.

Sport can bring communities together and the FF encourages projects to ensure the spaces are used beyond just football. The FF has also developed a series of design principles and produced multi-sport guidance and policies to help ensure new PlayZones can accommodate a range of sports and activities.

4.13 Summary

The Football Foundation Playzones project is an initiative that has delivered significant benefits to local communities across England. The project has helped to increase participation in football, improve health and well-being, reduce crime, regenerate communities, and promote social inclusion. The project is a valuable asset to local communities and is helping to create a healthier, safer, and more inclusive society.

5 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 To enable the Council to enter into the Football Foundation framework to deliver the facilities at Manor Field and Barton Road, if desired, and with the necessary cost of the match funding identified in the report.
- 5.2 To identify if Cabinet wishes to pursue an opportunity, subject to FF funding availability, to submit grant applications for a facility in Wisbech Park and either a suitable site in March or Chatteris, being mindful of the likely match funding required for each facility.
- 5.3 The opportunity to deliver these impressive PlayZone facilities in Fenland is a once in a decade opportunity with significant funding being provided by the Football Foundation.
- 5.4 These facilities have been identified as needed by our local communities in a [third-party report developed on behalf of the Football Foundation](#). The benefits are significant and with Fenland identified as a priority area for the funding it is an opportunity to support our local communities with their health and physical activity, reduce anti-social behaviour, increase community cohesion and support under-served groups with enjoyable opportunities to be active.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Please note the consultation already undertaken and available in the November 2024 Cabinet report regarding PlayZones.

7 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 Given the funding from the Football Foundation there is no alternative approach to this programme, other than doing nothing.

8 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Legal Implications

The use of a FF framework contractor to deliver the proposed PlayZone sites is necessary and must be followed as part of any funding agreement with the FF and will comply with the Council's procurement regulations.

8.2 Financial Implications

FDC has been successful with two grant applications for these projects totalling £451,660.

A capital sum of £155,914 is necessary from FDC in order to proceed to the delivery of the two initial PZ's following rejection of a bid for support from a third-party funder for the Manor facility and the Government's Neighbourhood programme for Wisbech having no financial availability until April 2025.

8.3 Equality Implications

This programme seeks to reduce health inequalities by providing more opportunities to be physically active and will positively target underserved groups in the community.

9 SCHEDULES

N/A