Mellands Playing Fields, Gorton
Sports Mitigation Position Statement
December 2023

1.0 Introduction and Context

1.1 This paper sets out a position statement and outlines the work in progress in relation to the development of a sports mitigation strategy for Mellands Playing Fields, Gorton. The work will be concluded in the early new-year and a full report submitted for consideration as part of the overall planning application for the Mellands site in January 2024. It is anticipated that the Mitigation Strategy will be submitted during the determination period of the planning application.

1.2 In embarking on the mitigation strategy consultation has been undertaken with Manchester City Council (MCC) planning and Manchester Active, the not-for-profit organisation established and overseen by MCC, which is responsible for driving sport and physical activity across Manchester. Information and advice provided by Manchester Active has informed the work in progress and has helped to shape the potential solutions.

1.3 GMYF is a registered charity, whose origin dates to the mid 1800's. GMYF currently works with a wide variety of voluntary youth groups and projects throughout the most disadvantaged communities of Greater Manchester.

1.4 The Mellands site is owned and managed by GMYF and has historically played an important role in shaping the Gorton Community over many generations. However, the site has not been in full active use for a number of years and was completely closed before the pandemic in 2020. This was due to a variety of financial challenges including increased running costs and falling demand and revenues from pitch hires.

1.5 The western part of the site has lain vacant and disused for approximately 4 years (last played in April 2019) but previously accommodated 3 adult football pitches and 2 youth football pitches. The eastern part of the site has lain vacant and disused since 2013 (approximately 10 years).

1.6 Given the lack of use, GMYF can no longer operate a financially viable model for the number of pitches which have historically been located on site and therefore alternative options have been considered in order to retain the use of part of the site for football and deliver a new youth, community and sports hub.

1.7 Given the former use of the site as playing fields, it is acknowledged that the site will be subject to national and local policy in respect of playing fields. The mitigation strategy will seek to address these policies and will set out how the proposals will deliver a sustainable solution, which meets local needs and the priorities of the Manchester City Council *Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Assessment and Strategy Report (PPOSS)*, dated June 2022 and wider MCC policies.

2.0 Manchester City Council (PPOSS)

1.8 The annual monitoring review of the PPOSS is currently in progress and the updates will be available in January 2024. These updates will be used to assess and apply to the Mellands mitigation strategy.

1.9 In terms of the principles in the PPOSS, (which are unlikely to change), the PPOSS promotes a flexible approach to development considerations. The PPOSS suggests that proposals will be assessed on a *case by case* basis, which recognises the Manchester context specifically, particularly that land for replacement may be difficult to deliver, and investment into sport from disposal might be of benefit. In addition, in relation to development contributions, there are clear statements in the PPOSS around making sure that contributions lead to sustainable facilities, as a result of additional demand.

1.10 Within the PPOSS there is flexibility which confirms that direct replacement is not always required or the right solution. Case Law has confirmed that the application of NPPF (paragraph

99b), which requires that *'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';* shall be judged in terms of both quantity and quality.

1.11 Recent planning applications on sites at Manchester College and Harry Dalton Playing Fields sought to adopt these principles. On both sites a quantitative replacement occurred, where areas of existing sites that were not currently functional playing fields were brought into use. Agronomy Reports evidenced that there was a genuine creation of new functional playing field land. These principles have guided the site search work and will inform the agronomy feasibility work and final overall mitigation strategy for Mellands.

3.0 Emerging Mitigation Strategy

1.12 Playing fields will be retained on the Mellands site in order to meet local needs. At present it is proposed that two full-size adult pitches will be provided. These are not functional at present and are likely to require significant work to be brought back into use. Agronomists are currently undertaking feasibility work on the Mellands site to assess the extent and scope of works required and costs to deliver functional pitches to a good quality standard on the Mellands site, in order to bring them back into use and meet local demand.

1.13 Feasibility work is also being undertaken on replacement playing field sites in the Mellands catchment area. In consultation with Manchester Active an assessment has been made of potential sites within a 20-minute walk and 20-30 minute cycle of the Mellands site. This feasibility work is on-going with a view to bringing an appropriate site back into use, which is not currently functioning as playing fields.

1.14 It is anticipated that significant work will be required on the selected site to secure the capital works and to provide a commitment to long-term maintenance investment. The selected site will seek to represent a package which reflects genuine playing field replacement and mitigates for the loss of Mellands.

1.15 Alongside the proposed capital and revenue investment, discussions are also being held via Manchester Active with the Football Association and Football Foundation, plus local clubs to develop an *Activation Plan* for the selected site, to ensure end users are identified and proposals are sustainable.

1.16 Early indications are that the sites under consideration will help to meet local needs.

4.0 Conclusions and Way Forward

1.17 The feasibility work will be completed in early January and this will inform the final mitigation strategy. Discussions will continue in parallel with Manchester Active and the relevant NGBs and sports clubs to ensure the final proposals represent a comprehensive mitigation package, which meets local needs and priorities as set out in the PPOSS and which will deliver a sustainable solution.

1.18 The feasibility work and final mitigation strategy will be forwarded to the MCC for consideration and consultation with relevant consultees in January 2024.

1.19 As well as mitigation for loss it is also understood that contributions towards indoor and outdoor sport based on the additional demand created by the proposed houses may also be sought. This will be part of the overall s106 negotiations.