

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 18 June 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Health and Community

SUBJECT: Runcorn Linnets Football Club

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek Executive Board approval for proposals to re-locate Runcorn Linnets Football Club back into Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) Halton Borough Council give a grant contribution to a maximum of £100k towards the cost of re-locating Runcorn Linnets Football Club back into the borough, at the Halton Sports site.
- (2) Delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Portfolio holders of Corporate Services and Leisure and Community to determine leasing arrangements and operational issues in respect of the Halton Sports site.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 There has been a senior non-league football team in Runcorn since 1918, and Runcorn F.C., over the years achieved considerable success.
- 3.2 In recent years, the club experienced difficulties, resulting in the sale of their ground (Canal Street in Runcorn) in 2001. The club played at Stobart Halton Stadium and Prescott Cables ground until 2006, when it went into liquidation.
- 3.3 From this situation, fans formed a Supporters Trust to launch a new club, Runcorn Linnets F.C., to continue the history of Runcorn non-league football. This was a not-for-profit organisation akin to AFC United and Wimbledon AFC, run entirely by its members. The F.A. were happy to endorse the proposals and establish the team in the North-West Counties League. In its first season the club achieved promotion to the North West Counties Premier League.
- 3.4 The new Clubs aspiration was to return to its roots in Runcorn. Previously, HBC had instigated a study by Liverpool University into football provision in the borough. The study found that it was essential to have a senior team in the borough to which local people could aspire to play for, providing community links with local youth teams, developing the female game and disability sport, and policies that respond to the local agenda of healthy life styles. Runcorn Linnets, in their development plans, offer these opportunities.

- 3.5 Options appraisals were carried out to identify a site that the Linnets could relocate to. Details proposals were worked up for a site at Riverside College. The Club attempted to raise external funding to support this proposal but the economic down turn mitigated against this. HBC staff have worked closely with the club in their aspirations, and when the Riverside Site was proved to be clearly unaffordable, other options were considered. Ultimately the development of a facility at the Council owned Halton Sports site was appraised to be the best and most effective option.
- 3.6 The requirements to play at their immediate and aspirational levels can be met by developing a facility at Halton Sports. This involves changing facilities, seating and standing for spectators, official's accommodation, dugouts, floodlights etc. All this can be achieved at no detriment to existing and future users of the site. Indeed it offers the exciting potential of developing a community centre of sporting excellence.
- 3.7 The Runcorn Linnets have played out of Witton Albion F.C.'s ground for the last two years. If the club is to survive and have long-term sustainability it does need to return to its fan base in Halton. Equally, if Halton wants to promote sport as a life-style option, it does need a senior club that is rooted in its community and involved in its community. The F.A. fully support the aspirations and the approach of the club.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 To re-locate Runcorn Linnets F.C. back into Halton would fully support the findings of the Council commissioned report into football in the Borough by Liverpool University.

5.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The total cost of the scheme is £200k. Efforts made by the Club to fund-raise and attract external funding from the Football Association have closed the current funding gap to £100k. It is hoped that this sum could be reduced by sponsorship and grant funding from Sport England. This report, however, requests the grant funding to a maximum of £100k from HBC to enable the scheme to progress to meet the timescales of the F.A. to re-locate the Club back into Halton. The grant funding can be found within existing resources from managed underspends across the Culture and Leisure budgets. There are no revenue costs to the Council. All running costs will be met by the Club.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The Club have established partnership arrangements with local junior teams, and have programmes to coach into local schools.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None identified.

6.2 A Healthy Halton

Physical activity contributes to healthy life-styles and the preventative agenda. The Club has and will further develop plans for community participation in football.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None identified.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The proposal to develop at Halton Sports will enhance the site and could bring economic benefits to the local community.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 For Runcorn Linnets not to be re-located back into Halton would almost certainly lose the Borough its opportunity to develop the senior non-league game.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The Club has an equality and diversity policy, and needs to have to qualify for F.A. funding. As mentioned previously, the Club are developing a female side.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.