

Protecting Playing Fields

Bolton Rugby Union FC



CASE STUDY THEMES

- Rugby
- Improved existing pitch
- Winter use
- Project management consultancy
- Financial sustainability

PROJECT SUMMARY

Facility name	Bolton Rugby Union FC / Mortfield
Lead organisation	Bolton Rugby Union FC
Organisation type	Sports club
Location	Bolton, North West
Sport	Rugby Union (also Rugby League and variety of sporting uses by local youth groups)
Total project cost	£127,400
PPF funding	£50,000 (39% of total)
Other funding sources	Landfill Communities Fund, Bolton Rugby Union FC
Tender process	Rugby Football Union contractor framework
Contract type	JCT Minor Works contract
Start and end date	March 2012 - August 2013
Duration of capital works	18 months
Increased usage achieved per week during season	1-2 hours

Achieved outcomes

- Helped the club to provide a more complete, year-round sporting programme
- Assisted with retention of existing players and recruitment of new ones, including young players
- Contributed to talent development for different abilities and age groups
- Expanded use of the pitches by other sporting societies and community groups
- Improved the club's financial situation



Introduction

Bolton RUFC has the only dedicated Rugby Union facility in Bolton, located in the disadvantaged ward of Halliwell. The club's three rugby pitches and a training area are on a brownfield site (a former mill) and were in need of refurbishment as they were often unplayable in winter due to a waterlogged, muddy and generally poor quality playing surface. As a result matches and training sessions were often cancelled, making it difficult for the club to complete a full programme of activities for all teams and age groups, building up fixture backlogs and creating problems in terms of attracting new players, retaining existing ones, limiting match-day revenue and its use by other local groups. The fields were also affected by anti-social behaviour (including off-road bikes and stolen cars) which tended to be worse when the pitch was unused by the club for long periods.

The Project

The project sought to improve drainage and level the three rugby pitches. It also included the installation of boundary fences to demarcate the site more clearly, without limiting community access to the pitches which is designated as green space for the use of local people under the terms of the club's lease. The plan to refurbish the fields had existed for a long time, though the club was not able to finance it from their own reserves or obtain capital funding from the Rugby Football Union (RFU). The club was however able to match the £50,000 PPF grant with £75,000 from the Landfill Communities Fund (administered by Viridor) and £2,400 of their own reserves. The RFU covered the costs of site surveys and pitch assessment and a project management consultancy to organise the tendering process but also to manage relationships and payments. PPF funding meant that the project happened much more quickly than it might otherwise have done, and in one hit rather than in several phases, limiting upheaval and reducing some of the associated costs.



(Before)

Outcomes

The Playing Field

As a result of this work, the pitches are all really high quality, attractive playing surfaces (only the training pitch area is still to 'bed-in') which are a great asset to the club and the area. The new (low) perimeter fence prevents access by vehicles so has stopped anti-social behaviour without preventing local people from using the pitch when not it is not being used for rugby. Dog walkers and others now tend to walk around the pitches rather than across.

“The new pitches have rejuvenated the club” (Committee member)

Sports Participation

Participation has increased thanks to the facility being used for a full programme of matches and training six days per week, with only two weekends lost to the weather over the past season as a result of heavy snowfall. Although it is probably too early to say conclusively whether the new pitches are having a sustained impact on levels of participation, the club highlight a number of positive effects. At adult level, the pitches have helped the club to retain existing players and attract some new ones, including at first team level. This has helped the teams to perform better (and also to play a more attractive style of rugby) than they have for some time.

THROUGHPUT	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Target	58,356	65,828	70,000	72,500	73,000	73,500
Actual	-	No data				

At junior level, the club felt that the pitches were a major disincentive to new players and their families. Players that are new to rugby or with no family background in the sport were often put off by muddy, waterlogged pitches and frequent cancellations of matches and training sessions. The club can now run a complete programme of ability and age groups and coaches can now plan their sessions (with confidence) over the course of a season. This is important in Rugby Union as new technical areas are added each year as players develop in strength and skill. The longer-term sustainability of the club and its teams is also benefitted though attracting and retaining new junior members, with around 40 new junior members over the past season. In addition to Rugby Union, the pitch is used by Bolton Mets Rugby League in the summer, by Bolton University students and for a range of other uses (e.g. rounders, football, archery, cricket and sports days) by local youth groups.

Lead Organisation and Partners

It appears that the new pitches are helping the club financially, by avoiding the loss of income associated with cancelled matches and sessions (e.g. food and drink takings). At the same time, the new pitches have given added impetus to the club's partnership working with organisations from across the area and further afield within rugby circles. This mainly because the previous poor quality of the pitches meant that they often had to decline or cancel use by other organisations. The club continues to host activities run by Bolton Council Childrens' Services and Get Active health team and has hosted increasing numbers of events, such as the Emerging Schools rugby league and British Colleges competitions, as well as referee training, coaching courses and corporate events. This was not the club's first experience managing funding bids and projects, and key members were able to apply the experiences from previous projects this time around. The club are currently working to maintain and improve the club house and are planning a new kit store building in the near future.

Local Community

The new pitches are a great asset to the local community, one of very few good quality sporting facilities and attractive green spaces in the area. The club (and especially its junior development officer) is working hard to engage local schools, groups and individuals from a range of backgrounds and often subsidise fees for local players in financial difficulty. The club also plays host to the Halliwell Multicultural Festival. The club is managed and run by volunteers, in addition to committee members there are currently 30 volunteer coaches (plus senior players who help out with junior sessions), and the club provides opportunities for many members and parents to get involved in different aspects of the club's activities (including groundskeeping). Volunteers take courses and qualifications in a range of areas, from the various levels of coaching to CASC (Community Amateur Sports Clubs) scheme, first aid, health and safety and child safeguarding. The club have also taken part in activities under the Join In Olympic legacy programme.



Key Findings

A number of factors were key to the project's success. This includes a committed membership base, continuity amongst the key members leading the project and previous experience of managing funding bids and projects. The club feel it is important to define a small and autonomous project delivery group to avoid delays in decision making.

Although the Rugby Football Union did not provide capital funding for the project, their support has been important, in terms of the initial preparatory assessments, selecting the contractor and retaining a project management consultancy. The initial work meant they were able to properly evaluate the aims of the project and its scope, working out the likely costs and matching this against the funding available. They were also able to include this technical information in their bid.

The use of a project management consultancy combined with the selected contractor's experience of working on funded projects, has helped to avoid problems between funder, club and contractor with the short delay in completion due to adverse weather conditions. The club and its volunteers will continue to maintain and improve the pitches to safeguard the work that has been done and avoid future deterioration.

The main challenges were legal or bureaucratic, specifically issues around extending the lease to the required 25 years, while they would also have been grateful for more advance information relating to Sport England's timetable, such as the scheduling of project management milestones (e.g. monitoring, reporting and payment).

