

Strong Teamwork and Careful Planning Proves a Winning Combination in Delivering Sustainable Community Sports Facilities in North Oxfordshire

In an increasingly challenging funding climate, a team of determined stakeholders, enthusiastic players, dedicated fans, loyal supporters and experienced professionals have demonstrated that the combination of specialist expertise, hard work and ambition can successfully deliver sustainable new sport and leisure facilities for local communities.

A three year scheme, developed by Oxford City Football Club in conjunction with Oxfordshire Netball Development Board, secured grant funding of £1.425m, enabling it to realise its aspiration of building new and improved community sports and leisure facilities.

The site at Court Place Farm, to the North East of Oxford, has been home to Oxford City Football Club for many years, where it leases an area from the City Council for its stadium pitch. The Club was founded in 1882 and was awarded the Football Foundation Community Club of the Year in 2008 and Oxfordshire Club of the Year in 2009. This impressive history has been achieved despite an ageing pavilion and unlit training pitches.

Recognising the potential that new, more suitable facilities could offer its players and the wider community, the Club worked closely with Oxfordshire Netball Development Board to develop a scheme that would enable both sports to fulfil their growth potential, through attracting more players, using the facilities for further training and coaching and attracting significant educational and community group use. Both the Club and the Oxfordshire Netball Development Board were determined to support significantly more players, users and sports with a viable and sustainable facility which would be available for all sections of the community to use.

The Club prides itself on its emphasis on inclusion and has developed formal education partnerships with local schools, colleges and universities, recognising the importance of education and training in improving performance in sport, social inclusion and health. It works closely with Oxfordshire Football Association, hosting courses for players, referees and volunteers.

Oxfordshire Netball has experienced considerable growth in affiliated playing membership, which has been constrained by a lack of suitable courts in the County, which are needed for coaching and development, as well as matches. The Oxfordshire Netball Development Board plans to host County wide leagues and tournaments, bringing regional tournaments back to the County.

The Court Place Farm site provides a single venue for 34 junior and senior football teams, which has been stretched to capacity for a number of years. The new facility include a full size, 3rd Generation floodlit artificial grass pitch, six floodlit netball courts, a new pavilion with changing rooms and community lounge and 120 car parking spaces, including allocated disabled spaces, 36 safe and secure cycle parking spaces and 3 coach parking bays, in addition to the existing three senior and one mini-size grass football pitches.

The dedicated team, comprising of members of Oxford City Football Club, members of the Oxfordshire Netball Development Board, specialist sports facility development consultancy Sports Solutions, architects Stride Treglown and drainage, lighting and ecology specialists, carefully researched and planned this significant project, working together to ensure that the scheme delivered against the agreed objectives, as well as against local and national Government's objectives for sport.

Partnership working has proved vital to securing funding for this exciting scheme to expand the facilities at the site and fulfil the growth potential of both Oxford City Football Club and Oxfordshire Netball, as well as delivering benefits to the wider community at a grass roots level.

Acting as project managers for the team, Sports Solutions has secured £1.425m funding from a number of sources, including £932k from the Football Foundation, £83k from the Football Stadia Improvement Fund, £60k from England Netball, £350k from Sport England through the Sustainable Facilities fund and support of £125k from Oxford City Council and £40k from Oxford Sports Council. This was in addition to a significant contribution from Oxford City Football Club, which raised £225k through its club members, and sponsors and £90k from the Oxfordshire Netball Development Board from clubs, trusts and donations, who took a very active role, directly fund raising throughout the whole project and promoting the scheme among potential users in local educational institutions and the wider community.

Strong working relationships and shared, agreed objectives are key to the success of all community sports facility schemes, as demonstrated by the project at Court Place Farm. By working closely with its partners and appointing experts such as Sports Solutions, Oxford City Football Club ensured that the scheme supported the needs of football and netball in the area, as well as the needs of the wider local community and objectives set by local and national Government. As a result, key governing bodies, the Football Association and England Netball, identified the scheme as a strategic priority in their plans.

Recognising the importance of careful research and planning in every aspect of this scheme, the team appointed experts to complete a range of professional assessments of site, flood risk, traffic and environment. This comprehensive element of the project included a specialist drainage strategy and flood risk assessment, Visual Impact Assessment, Transport Assessment, lighting strategy and ecological survey, carried to identify the impact on the local community and environment, which was particularly important as Court Place Farm is located in a green belt area.

As part of the project, the whole team ensured extensive consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders, including Sport England the Football Association, England Netball, Oxford City Council Leisure Services, local sports club and local resident groups, during two public consultation events, ensuring that all those involved and with the potential to benefit from the improved facility were given the opportunity to input into the scheme.

It is increasingly important for sports clubs to be sustainable businesses in order for them to survive and develop, and this is challenging for most clubs. Sports Solutions worked with

the Club to ensure the long term viability of the facility, preparing comprehensive financial forecasts. Oxford City Football Club will continue its successful relationship with the Oxfordshire Netball Development Board. A management board of representatives has been formed from a broad range of stakeholders, who will have responsibility for managing the community use of the facility.

As concerns about health and fitness increase, new sports facilities which are accessible to all members of the community and which attract more users to sport and recreation will help to address this at a local level.

The new facility will open at the end of November and will provide all-weather facilities for use by community groups and organisations, schools and colleges, as well as the Football Club's junior and senior players and Oxfordshire netballers, both during the daytime and evening.

As a result of the determination and dedication of the team responsible for this new facility at the home of Oxford City Football Club, football and netball in North Oxfordshire are now on a path to fulfil their growth potential and improve the training and development of those involved in both sports.

The funding climate may have changed for the foreseeable future, but the team responsible for successfully delivering Oxford City Football Club's new community sports facility has proved that with comprehensive planning by a dedicated and experienced team there is still a bright future for sport from grass roots level and beyond.

