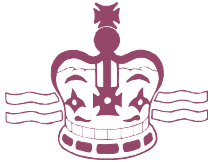




# DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF CHOOSING A FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR FOOTBALL TURF

## Decision making process



### BACKGROUND

Kingsbrook College installed a FIFA RECOMMENDED Football Turf in April 2006.

The case study highlights the background for the college choosing a FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR Football Turf, and the decision making process behind their decision. The case study is intended to help other schools, communities and Universities in making an "informed decision".

Kingsbrook College is based in a village called Deanshanger, England. The nearest city being Milton Keynes.

The College's previous natural sports pitch facility was poor and just had traditional un-drained grass fields, built on a flood plain. For about 3 months of the year, they found that sometimes the pitch or grass fields were in water to a depth of most probably 30cm for about 10 weeks, dramatically reducing the usage time through the academic year. The closure of the pitches was the norm and so sparked an idea to develop an all-weather pitch surface able to cope with their restrictive environmental pressures, and to help increase school and community usage.

The other major area of importance was that of the rurally deprived nature of the surrounding village area. No high-quality sports surfaces were available to the local community. There was also a very limited bus service into Milton Keynes, and although Milton Keynes is only 6–8 miles away, in the evening it is nearly impossible to travel there unless private transportation is available. Similar problems existed for the surrounding villages too, so the potential to serve a greater catchment area was an additional factor.

The project was conceived and developed through 2003 to 2005 and was finally constructed in September 2005. With the Football Turf being FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR in April 2006.

### GENERAL PLANNING

There was a demand for a high quality sports surface that could offer the desired playing quality, as well as be able to cope with local environmental conditions and varied usage. And a surface that could promote revenue generation for the pitch owners.

A questionnaire was developed by the college for market research that was sent out to 1,000 local families, to gauge what they thought was needed to improve sports provision and which sports were important to them. The college used their students, as well as their families to complete the questionnaire, because they were local and it involved their parents. In addition, it was sent to a wide spectrum across all age ranges within the community. When they had to state their preference for the type of sport to make provisions for, 80–90% said that they wanted football facilities in preference to hockey facilities. The college was initially considering a multisport facility to include hockey and football. This result changed the focus of the pitch design and gave full priority to a football only specification. After the response from the community, and after a lot of contact with all the local sports clubs, contact with South North Hants District Council (SNDC), North Hants County Council (NCC), the Football Foundation and the Football Association, they realised they were in with a chance of possibly getting what they initially thought, a half-size pitch. After investigation, it was concluded that

a full sized pitch would help to carry more capacity, and could be relied upon to generate more income during the higher capacity of its lifetime.

NCC basically gave them support, whereas the SNDC, who also in their community development plan had said the area was short of facilities, supported them. That, by all accounts, was a real challenge to negotiate because of different viewpoints between South Northants District Council and Northamptonshire County Council and their Councillors. Each was saying this should be part of the education system only. But the whole of the bid in the opinion of the college's representatives, who pushed on, was in fact community based.

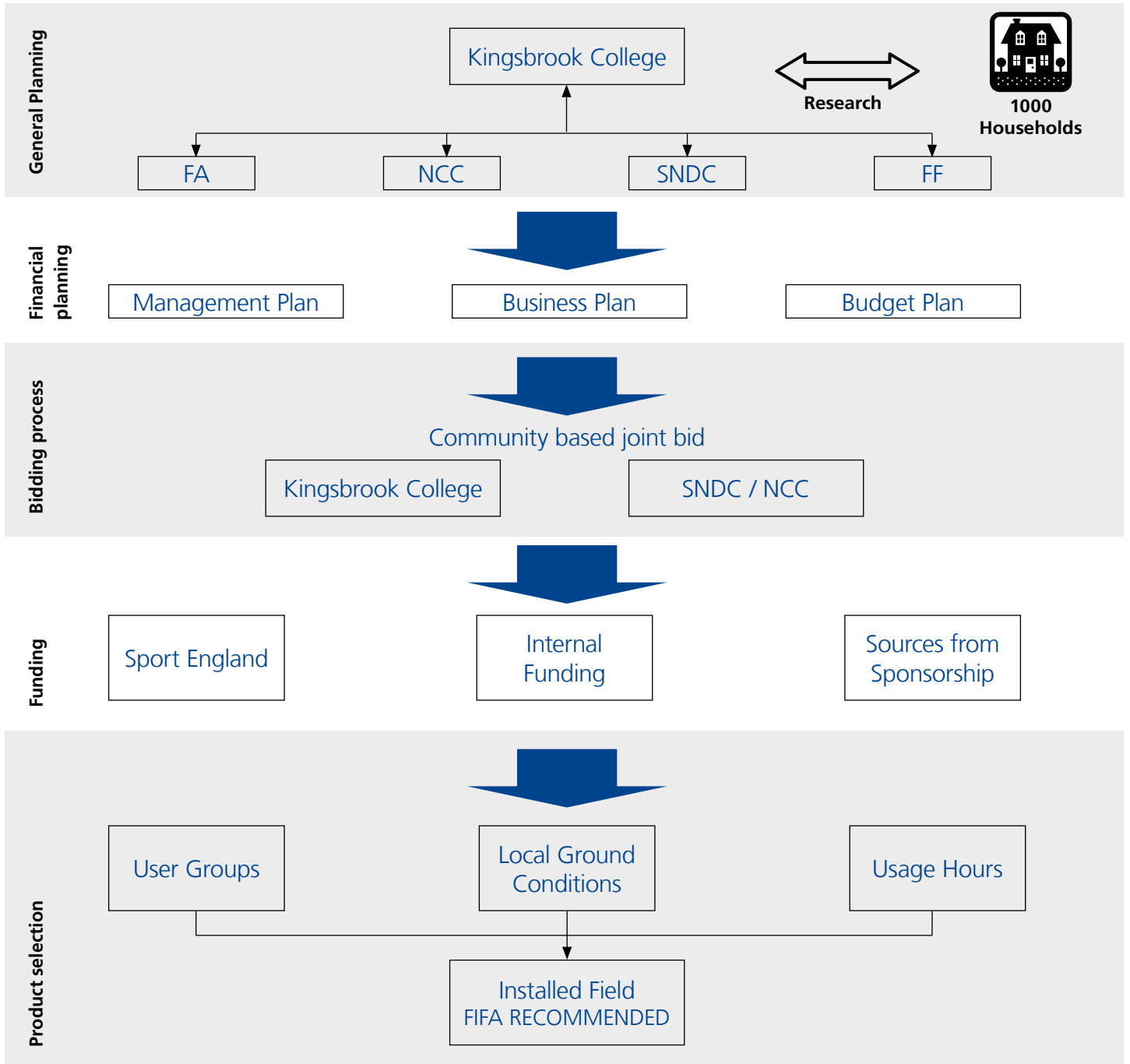
The bid was 60% community emphasis and 40% school emphasis, but they maintained the school is part of the community and so they felt no grievance over that classification. It was vital to the development process to push for this status, not only from a funding and management point of view, but also as a method to insure the pitch could meet its carrying capacity in the short and long-term. Otherwise, the out of school time slots would have been more difficult to consistently fill. Moreover, it would have raised ownership issues where the school could not have relied upon the local authorities for planning or other project management help.

Putting the project together as a joint bid (college and local authority) produced a shared vision for the area. It stopped being the "school football pitch" for a fortnight, to become an area belonging to the whole community. But the college use of the facility was secondary to the community process and that was absolutely clear, be-





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cause if they hadn't agreed, but merrily gone on as this being a school issue, it wouldn't have been successful. B, Northamptonshire wouldn't be talking to South Northants and C, everybody in the area would have said that they never get to use it. And if one looks at the majority of school based pitches, they are advertising for people to use it because it is "the school pitch".

All the local football teams were brought into the consultation, all community groups, primary schools, everybody, in fact they even spoke to a Business Chamber of Commerce about how it could be of use to them. So it was a community-based bid, and quite a lot of work was done to make sure that the need was out there, but this has now been proven since development. Accurate planning to gauge loading of the surface is highly important if the facility is to manage itself financially. Making a financial loss may be acceptable of course, based upon the position of the owner. However, if it is essential to break even or make surplus funds, either to be re-invested in the facility, or spent elsewhere, understanding the need to "sweat the asset" must be properly analysed. A fairly full evening from 6:00–10.00 pm most nights sees the pitch being used by the community across all ages and ability ranges every week. There are clashes and low priority times that must be considered, but on the whole there is a surplus of business waiting to use the pitch. On the flipside, it may well be that one pitch is not enough to satisfy a deprived sports area, and so the possibility of a second or at least a larger facility must be identified.

One of the major questions to consider during the planning stage, is whether or not changing and support facilities are also needed? Kingsbrook College are now

investigating funding opportunities to develop support facilities adjacent to the pitch because of the high level of community usage. Upon reflection it would have been prudent to apply for both the pitch and support facilities, but at the time it was unclear whether or not user groups would require them. A major fact here, is how unaware everybody involved was regarding just how far people would come to use a FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR Football Turf. Users are attracted to it from over ten miles away, based upon how well they perceive its quality to be in comparison to their own facilities (especially during prolonged periods of poor weather).

There is sometimes a problem with Schools' applying for funding for such projects, because the emphasis is put on the schools usage only. Once the beneficial impact for the community as a whole is understood, there is a much better chance the funding and government bodies will be on board with the project.

### **Vision for excellence**

What makes this project so different, was the vision for excellence and the fact they were doing everything possible to ensure top quality facilities that would promote the skill levels of their younger users. So looking at that vision of what could happen to young people, or how one could get the best out of them either in the school or community – looking at the Economic Development Plan of the area it talked about bringing in middle leaders and actually breeding the levels of middle leaders with the appropriate abilities to be directors of the local area. They also involved their primary schools and all of these backed them as they moved the project forward. All levels of the community

were pushing it; their parents and all their contacts, and they knew they were relatively small rural primary schools, but the vision that they had for the area was that they are part of it, and they supported the college in ways which they could bring into the bidding process.

### **FINANCIAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

The college went through a very detailed financial planning process that designed to cover all key requirements from a business point of view to ensure all eventualities that would affect the success of the pitch's development were investigated.

A management plan, business plan, budget plan and cost per annum revenue plan was all in the bid used to gain funding. The only major omission was a marketing plan, which upon reflection would have helped to establish pathways for the immediate loading capacity fulfilment. Initial market research was used of course, but wider research was not considered necessary because the college did not appreciate just how far users would travel from at the project conception time. Upon reflection, it would have meant an easier passage of pitch loading after completion, but this did build upon its own once the word-of-mouth and follow up marketing factors had been generated.

Sources for application and funding were also identified at this time, together with all associated costs to include surface supply and construction, maintenance provision, staffing, capital equipment, and other key items of importance.





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Cash and usage flow projects were developed, and it was not just a case of best case versus worst case scenario.

They worked on the basis of what they thought was the minimum they could achieve, and what was the maximum they thought they could get from it in terms of loading and usage, as well as how that influenced financial return.

The Governors of Kingsbrook College, whose only real financial commitment was to the school itself, agreed to back it whatever happened, so if it was going to run at a loss the school Governors and the budget would actually support that, because it was of benefit to the school. They decided that if it ran at a profit they would plough the funds back into the pitch, and into the sinking funds for replacement when the time arose. Analysing the present day costs of a future capital purchase – for the infill or carpet layer – everything must be made clear at the planning stage. Positively developing sinking funds will make a crucial difference to being able to make the required replacement of key pitch components, or at least will help offset a massive capital blow at the time of replacement, by breaking down the costs over the lifetime of the component. Expertise was brought in from the two local authorities, the board of governors and from outside the college, to help battle the figures and work through the various scenarios. They also put aside £5,000 a year, to go into a fund for surface replacement for when the time arose. It was predicted that a replacement may be necessary in approximately 12 to 15 years – although this period may well be exceeded. At that stage there will be £100,000 in the fund for whoever is managing the pitch to be able to go ahead with the replacement of the grass layer etc.

The College then basically did further research and analysis, got all the relevant forms, and approached Sport England. The Sport England fund-raising process proved positive and initially they were awarded £200,000 – but, in reality, in the end they actually received £280,000. The remainder of the capital requirement was sought from internal sources and through sponsorship.

### USAGE

The pitch is used during the day for the school's teaching programmes, and hired out to external local users and communities further afield during the evenings and at weekends. Almost constant usage takes place throughout the week, month and year, making optimal financial returns of the investment and permitting the pitch to easily support itself. This of course is the key to successful financial management with regard to forthcoming maintenance and replacement costs, not to mention the accuracy of initial cost budgeting to maintain the pitch during the course of its lifetime.

Because they are also part of the Secondary Sports College up the road, and closely linked with their primary schools, Kingsbrook actually provide a co-ordinator to organise primary school sports and help develop sporting expertise. Thanks to this initiative from the sports college, together with the use of the pitch, this has now become routine and the players on the field range from 5-years-of-age up to adults.

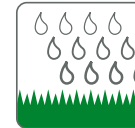


Improved playing conditions, which remain constant all year round.

### Commitment

The usage of the pitch has expanded to all levels of the game through local and regional communities.

Commenting on usage experiences so far, the College said "We've never closed, although there were exceptional bank holidays and a certain private company that actually resulted in a booking of 50 weeks". "The caretaker is in at weekends and over the Christmas period and summer seasons, which is great news, because the community are making use of it".



Unaffected by weather and resistant to harsh climatic conditions (rain, snow, drought, frost etc.).

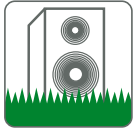
### ALL WEATHER PERFORMANCE

The college has reported the area to be phenomenal. They spoke about one night in particular, when everything surrounding the college was flooded including the flood plains. The rain was extremely heavy but the players just kept playing right through it. The FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR Football Turf didn't have any build-up of water whatsoever. The drainage under it is such high quality and there was amazement that they could continue to play, especially considering how little a volume of water was needed to close the old natural surfaces. In addition, frosts lift very rapidly and are never a reason for closing the pitch.





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A variety of potential uses: training, matches and cultural events can be held on the same turf.

## USER FEEDBACK ON SURFACE PLAYABILITY

All of the user groups from schools to semi professional teams, have reported the excellent playing possibilities of the pitch. The consistency of it in the face of changing climatic conditions is one of the major advantages. The surface is very close to the feel of a natural turf pitch, but provides more confidence where tackling and sliding are concerned, as compared to the heavy soil-based pitches in the area.

## PRODUCT SELECTION

They opted for the highest standard they could find at the time, with longevity of service and with the highest loading capacity in mind. Materials, construction and quality maintenance are all-important to guarantee the longevity and sustained playability of the 3rd generation artificial pitch. Choosing a cheaper pitch design may not necessarily mean poor quality, but the independent testing of materials and construction quality must take place if the dangers of poor performance are to be eliminated.

Kingsbrook wanted a FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR Football Turf, which was the highest standard available at the time. A full size pitch was decided upon so that it could be used to play matches at all levels, from primary school to adult age. A full sized pitch also enabled the college to split the total pitch area in three equally sized sections; playing each game across the normal line of play. This was essential if they were to promote higher levels of income generation

by grouping several different customers or classes onto the pitch at one time



Fewer playing fields required, because it has greater longevity.

## FURTHER DEVELOPMENT FOR FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR FOOTBALL TURF

They have had a lot of interest from other schools, as well as other institutions from all around the country, just asking if they can come down and have a look at the pitch. And no doubt pitch development will grow rapidly in the surrounding areas based on the success of Kingsbrook College. The college staff don't regard this as an inconvenience, as people coming to view the pitch greatly benefit their school and community! And if others can learn from the Kingsbrook experience, the college feels it is well worth the time invested on their part.

Their advice to anyone planning such a move, is to do your homework thoroughly during the planning and funding application processes. Another crucial factor, is the essential level of professional support on behalf of all government and community levels, so nothing is left to chance.



Easy maintenance and low maintenance costs.

## ESSENTIAL MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

The in-house caretaker carries out the day-to-day maintenance of the pitch, which

comprises mainly of litter collection and brushing only. The total weekly time taken is between four to six hours. Previously, specialist maintenance contractors were needed when the area housed a natural turf pitch. There will of course be times during the FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR pitch's lifetime when specialist maintenance will be needed, but this is far less frequent as compared to the annual needs of natural turf.

Financial provisions for maintenance practices, including materials and wages, are paid for with pitch usage fees. No major issues have arisen in the 18 months since the pitches installation with regard to maintenance or repairs. Only the marking lines for the secondary five-a-side pitches need to be repainted, and upon reflection should have been woven-in, the same as the primary football lines, during the manufacture of the carpet layer.

## CONCLUSION

Prior to making their final decision, Kingsbrook School consulted and discussed with all community stakeholders. They had a vision and long term approach. Maintenance and after care were key factors in the choice of FIFA RECOMMENDED Football Turf – and naturally its sustainable long term quality. Keeping that quality environment was paramount for the success and enjoyment of all.

