

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 11 September 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Employment Learning, Skills and Community

SUBJECT: DCBL Stadium - New PAVA system and Structural Steel Maintenance Works and Pitch Replacement

WARD(S) Central & West Bank

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Member approval to proceed with necessary works to the Public Address Voice Alarm (PAVA) System, the Structural Steelwork Repairs and replacement Pitch at the DBCL Stadium as identified in the report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) The capital works identified in the report in sections 3.3 to 3.6 be approved;**
- 2) Consideration be given to the options outlined in paragraph 5.4 below regarding how the annual capital financing costs might be funded;**
- 3) Council be asked to add these works to the capital programme based upon the totals outlined in paragraph 5.1 below, subject to further work to establish detailed costs and whether to proceed with option A or option B;**
- 4) Approval of the detailed costs and the option to be undertaken, be delegated to the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Employment Learning, Skills and Community.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Public Address Voice Alarm (PAVA) system at the stadium is in poor condition, it does not now meet current regulations and is not functioning correctly, thus is not fit for purpose. We have investigated the possibility of repairing the existing system, but it is evident that this is not feasible as such replacement is the only viable option.

- 3.2 The introduction of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, also known as the 'Protect Duty' aims to improve public safety by ensuring certain public venues and events implement measures to protect against terrorism. The replacement of the PAVA system at the stadium will help ensure that we meet the requirement of the act.
- 3.3 We have recently been through a procurement process in respect of the PAVA system to obtain competitive prices for the necessary work. The lowest tender return amounted to circa £850k inclusive of a contingency and fees.
- 3.4 The above figure accounts for works to all four stands, we could proceed on a phased basis however initially undertaking work to the South, West and North stands, with a view to completing the East Stand at a later date. The reduced cost for this amounts to circa £725k inclusive of a contingency and fees.
- 3.5 Problems with corrosion to the exposed structural steelwork at the Stadium was first identified in the Stadium's general safety certificate report dated October 2017. Since then, works to the worst areas of corrosion, the barriers, has been completed, but the latest safety report is now recommending that we progress with the dealing with the corrosion elsewhere to the steelwork.
- 3.6 We have not gone through a procurement process as yet in respect of the structural steelwork repairs/redecoration works, we have however obtained estimated costs for the work. The estimated cost for the repair/redecoration works amounts to circa £725k inclusive of fees to all four stands. We could proceed on a phased basis however commencing with works to the South, West and North stands only, the budget estimate for this amounts to circa £600k inclusive of fees. We will clearly need to go through a procurement process in respect of the above to obtain competitive quotes prior to proceeding.
- 3.7 A recent assessment conducted by specialist consultants, SportsLab, has confirmed that the stadium's artificial playing surface is exhibiting measurable signs of performance decline. These findings are consistent with the pitch's age and intensity of use. While current test results remain within the minimum acceptable thresholds, they are trending toward sub-optimal levels.
- 3.8 The report recommends that planning for full resurfacing should now commence. Prior to any capital investment, a more detailed investigation is advised to assess the integrity of the base layer and the effectiveness of the drainage system. This will be critical to ensuring long-term compliance with performance standards and to inform the scope of any future works.

- 3.9 In the short term, remedial works are being scheduled to address immediate concerns. These include an infill top-up and potential surface reconditioning, with an estimated cost of £10,000. Without this intervention, further deterioration could result in the pitch falling below compliance standards.
- 3.10 To support long-term planning, quotations will be obtained for a full pitch replacement. The estimated cost for a new artificial surface, including the installation of a new shock pad, is approximately £600,000.
- 3.11 Additionally, the stadium will seek quotations for alternative surface options, including hybrid and natural grass systems. Depending on the specification, these options could cost up to £1.2 million.
- 3.12 An artificial pitch would enable continued community access, supporting grassroots sports, school programmes, and local club activities. It would also provide consistent and reliable training facilities for stadium tenants, regardless of weather conditions or surface wear. The artificial surface is durable and generally more cost-effective to maintain over time. However, it would significantly limit the stadium's ability to host showcase events sanctioned by the RFL, RFU, and FA, as these governing bodies typically require natural or hybrid surfaces for elite-level fixtures. This limitation could impact the stadium's profile and revenue potential from high-profile matches.
- 3.13 In contrast, a grass or hybrid pitch would meet the standards required to bid for and host premier showcase events from the RFL, RFU, and FA. This would elevate the stadium's reputation and open up opportunities for show case events. The natural playing surface aligns with professional sport expectations and enhances the venue's appeal for top-tier competitions. However, the installation and ongoing maintenance of a grass or hybrid pitch would be significantly more expensive. It would also prevent community usage and restrict tenant access, particularly for training, in order to preserve pitch quality and avoid overuse.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no policy implications for the above work. The procurement process will comply fully with the Council's procurement policy and standing orders.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The estimated capital costs to carry out the works are as indicated below. This would require Council to approve an amendment to the capital programme to include these cost estimates.

Works	All stands and Grass / Hybrid	South, West and North Stands only and Artificial
	<i>Option A</i>	<i>Option B</i>
PAVA system	£850,000	£725,000
Steelwork Repairs	£725,000	£600,000
Pitch Replacement	£1,200,000	£600,000
Total	£2,775,000	£1,925,000

- 5.2 Based upon the capital expenditure estimates above, the annual cost of financing this expenditure would be approximately £0.235m for Option B and £0.373 for Option A.
- 5.3 There is no budget provision currently available to meet this annual revenue cost, therefore, it would need to be included as growth within the 2026/27 revenue budget. Given that the Council's revenue budget gap is currently being funded by borrowing under the Exceptional Financial Support arrangement, the above growth would increase the budget gap and therefore the amount of EFS borrowing required and associated cost.
- 5.4 Alternative options for funding/reducing the annual capital financing costs would include;
- obtaining a capital contribution from the stadium's tenants
 - significantly increasing the stadium tenant's annual rent
 - seeking external grant funding towards elements of the works
 - utilising the Council's building maintenance budget to fund the capital financing costs, thereby reducing the budget available in future years for maintenance of the remainder of the Council's property portfolio
 - deleting/reducing other schemes currently included within the Council's capital programme

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**
Pitch Replacement: Supports physical activity and community sports, promoting health and independence.
- 6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**
Investment in Infrastructure: Capital improvements stimulate local economic activity through procurement and employment.
Pitch Options: A hybrid or natural pitch could attract elite events,

boosting tourism and local business.

Artificial Pitch: Enables consistent community use, supporting grassroots sports and local clubs.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Artificial Pitch Benefits: Facilitates school programmes, youth clubs, and family-friendly activities.

Safe Stadium Environment: Encourages family attendance and participation in events.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Community Access to Facilities: Artificial pitch supports inclusive access for all groups, including those with fewer resources.

Safety Improvements: Ensures equitable protection for all visitors, regardless of background.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None identified.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Investment in a Key Community Asset: Demonstrates commitment to maintaining and enhancing a valued public venue.

Support for Local Events and Identity: Improvements position the stadium as a hub for community pride and engagement.

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1 Failure to upgrade the PAVA system will leave the Stadium in a vulnerable position as currently the system does not meet current regulations so this may impact on our ability to hold events at the Stadium in the future. It will also impact on ensuring that the building meets the requirements of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025.

7.2 Failure to undertake the remedial/redecoration works to the exposed structural steelwork will result in the further deterioration of the protective coating to the steelwork, which will ultimately lead to there being a health & safety risk which will negatively impact on the stadium.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None to report

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None to report.

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

10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.